

HOME CINEMA

HIGH-PERFORMANCE SOUND & VISION

Choice™



Life of luxury

Stunning high-end home theatre, p34

**THE HCC
MOVIE
AWARDS**
ESSENTIAL
BLU-RAYS & DVDs
FOR YOUR
COLLECTION



THE YEAR'S BEST BUYS!

50+ REVIEWS: The ultimate home cinema hardware
4K & Full HD TVs ■ Projectors ■ Dolby Atmos AV receivers
Blu-ray players ■ Soundbars ■ Speaker systems ■ & more!



■ GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY LANDS ON BD
■ TALKING TECH WITH SONY'S AV CHIEF
■ LOEWE'S 4K PLANS

www.homecinemachoice.com

ISSUE 242 JANUARY 2015 £4.50
AUS - \$9.99 NZ - \$12.99 CAN - \$12.99



01

9 771359 627095

Artcoustic™ Loudspeakers



Cinema design, re-defined

"If you're serious about home cinema at the premium level then these need to be on your shortlist"

"The soundstage created is both wide and deep, able to involve you unhesitatingly in the onscreen action"

"The Artcoustic system has a handy knack of revelling in quiet periods, painting a sonic picture, before bursting into life with shocking dynamism"

Home Cinema Choice, May 2014

DOLBY.ATMOS

Our UK Showroom is now fully upgraded to demonstrate Dolby Atmos

Artcoustic Denmark:

DK SHOWROOM (by appointment only)
Tel: +45 32836060
artcoustic@artcoustic.com
www.artcoustic.com

Artcoustic UK and Eire:

UK SHOWROOM (by appointment only)
Tel: +44 (0)1245 400904
salesuk@artcoustic.com
www.artcoustic.com

follow us on Facebook  Twitter  and Flickr 



Spitfire 24-12 SL

HOME CINEMA Choice

www.homecinemachoice.com

EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor Mark Craven
mark.craven@homecinemachoice.com
Deputy Editor Anton van Beek
anton.vanbeek@homecinemachoice.com
Art Editor John Rook

CONTRIBUTORS

Steve May, Richard Stevenson, Adrian Justins, Danny Phillips, Adam Rayner, John Archer, Ed Selley, Grant Rennell, Tekura Maeva, Martin Dew, Martin Pipe
Photography Mike Prior, Claire Collins

ADVERTISING

Senior Advertising Executive Jo Holmes
Tel: 01689 869 919
E-mail: joanna.holmes@homecinemachoice.com
Advertising Manager Shannon Bombach
Tel: 07710 934932
E-mail: shannon.bombach@homecinemachoice.com

MARKETING AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

UK: New, Renewals and Enquiries
Tel: +44 (0) 1858 438798
E-mail: mytimemedia@subscription.co.uk
USA & CANADA: New, Renewals and Enquiries
(001)-866-647-9191
REST OF WORLD: New, Renewals and Enquiries
Tel: +44 (0) 1689 869 896
BACK ISSUES
Tel: 0844 848 8822
From outside UK: +44 (0) 2476 322234
Email: customer.services@myhobbystore.com
www.myhobbystore.co.uk

MANAGEMENT TEAM

Group Editor Paul Miller, paul.miller@avtechmedia.co.uk
Group Sales Manager Duncan Armstrong
Head of Design and Production Julie Miller
Subscriptions Manager Kate Hall
Chief Executive Owen Davies
Chairman Peter Harkness

Published by MyTimeMedia Ltd

Enterprise House, Enterprise Way
Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF
Tel: 0844 412 2262
From outside the UK: +44 (0) 1689 869 840

Distributed in the UK by Seymour Distribution Ltd

TEST WALL IMAGES:

©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/CUI QUNYING
©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/SIMON INGATE



Home Cinema Choice, ISSN 1359-6276, is published monthly with an additional issue in May by AVTech Media Ltd, a division of MYTIMEDIA Ltd, Enterprise House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF, UK. The US annual subscription price is £50GBP (equivalent to approximately 108USD). Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named Air Business Ltd, c/o Warden Shipping Inc., 195-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica NY 11434, US Postmaster: Send address changes to Home Cinema Choice, Warden Shipping Inc., 195-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Subscription records are maintained at CDS GLOBAL Ltd, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 9ET. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.



When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.



If you can't always find a copy of this magazine, help is at hand! Complete this form and hand in at your local store, they'll arrange for a copy of each issue to be reserved for you. Some stores may even be able to arrange for it to be delivered to your home. Just ask!

Subject to availability

Please reserve/deliver my copy of Home Cinema Choice on a regular basis, starting with issue:

Title First name

Surname

Address

Postcode

Telephone number

If you don't want to miss an issue



WELCOME

Once again we're bringing an end to the year with our Yearbook special, celebrating the hardware and software that blew us away over the past twelve months. Our reviews section (beginning on p39) covers everything from 4K and Full HD TVs to amps, projectors, Blu-ray players, speakers, soundbars, headphones are more. So if you're looking for new kit, this is the place to start.



Meanwhile, **our annual Movie Awards showcases the Blu-rays that deserve a place in any disc collection.** Putting it together has been a blast, and the quality of modern releases, from the audio prowess of the likes of *Captain America* and *Transformers* to the visual splendour of *Gravity* and *Edge of Tomorrow*, never ceases to amaze me. Indeed, 2014 has birthed some brilliant Blu-rays, but which will be crowned Disc of the Year? Turn to p22 to find out...

Mark Craven
Editor



MENU



22



09



34



16

CONTRIBUTORS



John Archer:
The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



Richard Stevenson:
Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal ERT



Steve May:
HCC's former Editor-in-Chief is one of the UK's most respected AV journo



Martin Pipe:
Technical expert Martin is renowned throughout the home cinema industry



Adam Rayner:
The UK's foremost expert in extreme audio writes about bass, hi-fi and, er, cartoons



Adrian Justins:
Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*

FEATURES

In-depth interviews and special reports. Starts... p16

16 Sony: aiming high with hi-res audio

We catch up with Sony bigwig Ichiro Takagi to discuss the company's success in turning MP3 fans into hi-res audio freaks

COVER STORY

22 2014 Movie Awards

From action blockbusters to Hollywood classics, TV shows to animation, we reveal the year's biggest and best Blu-rays & DVDs

COVER STORY

34 Life of luxury

Check out this stunning home theatre – with a ten-pin bowling alley, too!

120 Certified: AV-holics!

Want inspiration for your setup? We revisit four of our favourite readers' rooms from the last year

BULLETIN

The place for hot products, trends and technology. Starts... p7

07 Bargain bigscreen

Finlux brings 4K TV to the masses

08 Prestigious Audio

Paradigm targets high-end cinema rooms with its new speaker family

09 British audio brand flies Solo

Arcam dabbles in the soundbar market

10 Wireless audio comes of age

Move over Sonos – Bluesound's audiophile music streaming ecosystem has arrived

12 Loewe's 4K resurrection

The premium AV marque unveils an all-4K/UHD TV lineup

13 News x10

Featuring Sony, Sky, Samsung and Sharp

14 Mind-blowing

Get ready for a smarter breed of action flick when *Lucy* hits BD and DVD in the New Year

REGULARS

Whether you want our opinions or your own, these are the places to look. Starts... p110

110 Feedback

Share your thoughts with other AV addicts

115 Digital copy

Why new AV formats don't spell the end for some old favourites

116 Film fanatic

Anton van Beek is worried about the way the major studios treat classic films on Blu-ray

118 The Insider

Got some new kit? Then don't forget to RTFM!

146 Point of view

Richard Stevenson lists all the things he hates about AVRs. It's a long list...

COMPETITIONS

112 Great prizes to be won!

Blu-ray copies of *The Expendables 3*, *The Strain* and *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For* up for grabs!

SUBSCRIBE! Sign up to the world's best AV magazine and you'll save money and get some great gifts **p20**



40 Sony KD-65X9005B

'A formidable 4K flatscreen with a groundbreaking design'



COVER STORY

BEST OF 2014

With a focus on performance, these are in-depth tests you can trust... p39

40-45 Televisions

Sony KD-65X9005B
Samsung UE65HU8500
LG 55EA980W
Panasonic TX-42AS600
Samsung UE55HU7500
Finlux 50F8075-T

46-54 AVRs, Amplifiers & Processors

Datasat RS20i/RA7300
Denon AVR-X4100W
Yamaha RX-A3040
Pioneer VSX-924
Marantz NR1605
Onkyo TX-NR838
Primare SPA23

58-74 Loudspeakers

Artcoustic Spitfire SL 7.2
Kreisel Sound Quattro Series 7.2
DALI Rubicon LCR 5.1
Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1
Q Acoustics Q7000i
Quad L-ite Plus 5.1

JBL Studio 2 Series 5.1
Tannoy HTS-101
Bowers & Wilkins 683 Theatre
Dynaudio Excite 5.1

76-83 Projectors

JVC DLA-X700R
Epson EH-TW6600W
BenQ W1070+
Sony VPL-HW40ES

84-90 Soundbars & Soundbases

Yamaha YAS-103
Q Acoustics Media 4
Panasonic SC-HTE80
Pioneer SBX-N500
Canton DM 50



92 Cinema systems

Panasonic SC-BTT505

94-95 Subwoofers

SVS SB-2000
REL S5

96-99 Blu-ray players

Oppo BDP-105D
Sony BDP-S7200
Panasonic DMP-BDT700

100-108 Accessories

Dune HD Base 3D
Sony MDR-HW700DS
Lindy Cromo NCX-100
Oppo PM-1
Simple Audio Listen
One For All Nevo
Manhattan Plaza HD-T2
Devolo dLAN 650 Triple+
HDanywhere mHub

PLAYBACK



The latest Blu-rays, DVDs and videogames reviewed and rated. Starts... p133

- 134 Sin City: A Dame to Kill For 3D
- 135 How to Train Your Dragon 2 3D: Deluxe Edition
A Million Ways to Die in the West
Jersey Boys
Maleficent
- 136 Guardians of the Galaxy
- 138 Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel!
The Evil Within
Penny Dreadful: The Complete First Season
Sleepy Hollow: The Complete First Season
Battlestar Galactica: The Complete Original Series
- 139 Transformers: Age of Extinction
- 140 X-Men: Days of Future Past 3D
- 141 Into the Storm
Spirited Away
Out of the Unknown
The Day the Earth Caught Fire
Breaking the Waves
- 142 The Wizard of Oz 3D
Once Upon a Time in America: Extended Director's Cut
The Naked City
Diary of a Lost Girl

ENTER A NEW WORLD OF SOUND.



PIONEER'S NEW AVR'S (SC-LX58 AND UP) WITH DOLBY ATMOS® TRANSPORT YOU



from an ordinary moment into an extraordinary experience with captivating, multi-dimensional sound that fills your room with amazing depth and rich quality. Uniquely, Pioneer LX models feature high performance Class D digital amplification, capable of delivering astonishing speed, power, accuracy and performance as well as utilising high energy saving and efficiency capabilities.

Selected models* have also undergone Air Studios' rigorous certification process. This prestigious seal of approval ensures that whether watching movies or listening to music, the audio is reproduced precisely as the artist intended. Welcome to a new world of sound that delivers the full impact of entertainment – it will move your mind, body, and soul.

Begin the journey at www.pioneer.co.uk/receiver

FEEL EVERY DIMENSION IN  DOLBY ATMOS™

 air studios

 Pioneer.electronics
 @PioneerUK

Pioneer

Dolby, Dolby Atmos, and the double-D symbol are registered trademarks of Dolby Laboratories.
All other trademarks remain the property of their respective owners. © 2014 Dolby Laboratories, Inc. All rights reserved.

*Air Studios models are SC-LX78 and SC-LX88 only

BULLETIN

→ **NEWS HIGHLIGHTS** **PARADIGM** Prestigious new line-up of home cinema loudspeakers
ARCAM Taking an audiophile approach to soundbars **LOEWE** Premium brand goes all-in with 4K/UHD
BLUESOUND Wireless audio streaming for the hi-fi generation **NEWS X10** The hottest news stories in bite-size chunks **LUCY** Celebrate the New Year with this mind-bending action flick **AND MUCH MORE!**

Bargain bigscreen

Finlux 65UT3E242S-T → www.finlux.co.uk

Direct retailer Finlux has joined the 4K TV party and, as usual, hopes to tempt those of us seeking a value-for-money upgrade – this 65in UHD screen retails for a paltry £1,500. In addition to its hi-res capability, the 65UT3E242S-T features Passive 3D, a Smart hub, USB PVR recording from its Freeview HD tuner, and Wi-Fi, Bluetooth and Miracast connective options.



Prestigious audio

Paradigm Prestige → www.anthemavs.co.uk



Paradigm is targeting your high-end cinema room with its new Prestige range of speakers. Available in a selection of lush real-wood finishes, the new models employ the brand's proprietary Perforated Phase Aligning tweeter tech to improve and extend high frequencies, in addition to handcrafted bass and midrange drivers. Buyers have three floorstanders to choose from, plus two centre channel models and a bookshelf design. Pricing begins at £1,600(p/p) for the latter, and rises up to £5,600(p/p) for the 95F floorstander in Midnight Cherry or Piano Black.

Teevy or not Teevy?



Convincing room-filling surround audio from a soundbase? That's what Crystal Acoustics is promising with the latest addition to its Reference Wireless Series of speakers. The £300 Teevy 6 soundbase employs six drivers (including two 5.25in subwoofers claiming a frequency response down to 38Hz), and a 'complex' DSP to create a widely dispersed soundfield from its 100W Class D amp. AptX Bluetooth streaming, as well as optical, analogue stereo and 3.5mm inputs, round out the connective options.
www.crystallaudiovideo.com

Small cost, big screen



There's a new player in the UK TV market. Online electronics retailer ao.com has launched its own range of low-cost TVs under its new Techwood brand. The range launched in November with 40in and 50in Full HD screens, plus a 50in Smart TV. Five further models are promised for late December, with wallet-friendly prices running from £120 to £350. 'Right now, there's no other retailer, online or on the high street, that can touch the level of service and insight for TV that we have,' claims ao.com CEO John Roberts.
www.ao.com

Splash of colour



Luxury AV manufacturer B&O has partnered with fashion designer Stine Goya to bring another layer of panache to its BeoVision 11 television and two of its wireless speakers: the BeoLab 17 and BeoLab 20 (pictured). The result is four new colour options for the kit – Midnight Green, Rumba Red, Forged Iron and Driftwood. Marie Kristine Schmidt, Vice President Design, Brand and Marketing at B&O says that 'Stine's craftsmanship and understanding within her field matches Bang & Olufsen perfectly.'
www.bang-olufsen.com

British AV brand flies Solo

Arcam promises an 'audiophile approach' to the soundbar market

Arcam has finally entered the soundbar arena with the Solo bar, an £800 stereo model with some enthusiast-level features such as HDMI inputs, 4K passthrough and built-in Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA decoding. Constructed from premium materials and components, the Solo uses the Wolfson circuitry that features in Arcam's AVR range. A separate wireless subwoofer is also available, selling for £500.

HCC attended the product launch in London, where MD Charlie Brennan was in bullish mood. 'Most soundbars offer poor audio performance for TV and are dreadful on music,' he declared. Brennan also revealed a disdain of sound 'projectors' and their DSP modes, 'which introduce noise.'

The no-nonsense Solo has a simple stereo configuration and downmixes multichannel sources. Although processing is minimal there are optional Movie and Concert modes that use some mild spatial effects. 'The coefficients are set to avoid the usual headache-inducing sound many bars deliver,' says product manager Andy Moore, taking up the rival-baiting baton.

Moore explained that Arcam used two-channel material as its reference to tune the Solo's sound quality. 'Hollywood movies are relatively easy to



Charlie Brennan: 'There is a clear gap in the booming soundbar arena for an audiophile approach.'

reproduce, all that whizz, bang, crash stuff. Using music as our reference means we made a product where you can hear dialogue without adjusting the volume.'

The Solo is powered by a 100W Class D amp with the optional wireless sub adding a 300W low-end boost. The bar's cabinet is a damped, low-resonance aluminium enclosure containing six drive units. Either side of the central display are the bass and mid-range drivers, plus the tweeters, which are angled outwards by five degrees to create greater dispersion into the room.

Connectivity comprises four CEC-enabled 4K passthrough HDMI inputs, one HDMI out with ARC, coaxial, optical and a 3.5mm line input, but no USB. Music can be streamed to the 'bar using aptX Bluetooth. The Solo comes with a microphone for auto setup, whilst the supplied remote control can be complemented by a free iOS or Android app.

Wireless speakers grounded

Having ventured back in to the speaker market with the Solo, is Arcam tempted to re-enter the wireless speaker sector too, an area where it previously impressed with its rCube speaker dock? Priced at £350, Arcam sold over 10,000 units, but Brennan says there was not much profit in it and that Arcam's distribution network is not set up for wireless kit.

He is also dismissive of another common option, that of selling through John Lewis. 'You have to pay them tens of thousands of pounds just to get ranged, then most customers buy online and send the product back to John Lewis without all the parts and we have to replace them.'

PLAYLIST...

Team HCC spins up its disc picks of the month

Edge of Tomorrow 3D (All-region BD)

This smart and witty sci-fi flick packs a hefty punch on your home cinema thanks to the Blu-ray's intricately detailed visuals and invigorating lossless sonics.



American Horror Story: Coven (All-region BD)



The completely bonkers anthology series serves up a wicked spin on *Harry Potter* with this tale of a school for witches in New Orleans.

Gremlins: Diamond Luxe Edition (All-region BD)



Joe Dante's festive creature-feature benefits from even more extras in this welcome Blu-ray upgrade.

Vikings: Season Two (All-region BD)



An impressive Blu-ray package for a superb historical drama that grows in confidence with every season.

Natural Born Killers: Director's Cut (All-region BD)



We're absolutely thrilled to finally have the unexpurgated version of this controversial classic in HD.



The Solo soundbar can stream audio to Bluetooth 'phones

EXTRAS...

Small items that could make a big impression

On Set with John Carpenter

This hardback collects together a plethora of wonderful behind-the-scenes and publicity photos shot by Kim Gottlieb-Walker during the production of five of the horror auteur's most iconic early films.

RoboCop: The Definitive History

While it doesn't really unearth anything new about Verhoeven's sci-fi classic, this book fares much better in lifting the lid on its sequels, TV spin-offs and this year's remake.

Touch Mini Boombox

Fed up with the squawky output of your smartphone or MP3 player? This 3W add-on speaker may help. Claiming a (rechargeable) battery life of five hours, it sells for £22 from www.geniegadgets.co.uk.

Stranger than Fiction

This enthralling biog of Edgar Wallace (the man who created *King Kong*) reveals a life every bit as amazing as the fantastical thrillers he penned.

Wireless audio comes of age

New music streaming ecosystem should stop audiophiles feeling blue

Multiroom audio, wireless streaming and high-resolution audio have come together in the shape of Bluesound, a music ecosystem from Lenbrook, the Canadian company behind the likes of NAD and PSB.

As Lenbrook's director of market development John Banks told *HCC*: 'Bluesound is for true audiophiles, because the entire system has been designed from the ground up. You can't just stream 24-bit/192kHz audio, you've got to have the equipment that will show you the difference. This is what defines our brand.'

Aiming higher than the likes of Sonos, Bluesound's entry-level player is the £400 Node, which like all of the brand's music players is compatible with Mac OS X and most Windows platforms. It can stream full resolution 24-bit/192kHz FLAC studio master recordings over a wireless home network as well as standard audio formats, including AAC, ALAC, WAV, AIFF, WMA, OGG and MP3.

The Node requires separate amplification, but can be controlled using a free app for iOS or Android, which features large album art views and playlist management, plus compatibility with music streaming services such as Spotify, Qobuz and Tidal. It also allows cross-folder browsing, allowing you to choose which version of a track you want from multiple streaming sources. Alternatively, a bespoke desktop controller is available for PC and Mac.

Priced at £700, the Pownode adds a 90W Class D stereo power amp and a



John Banks: 'Bluesound is for true audiophiles because the entire system has been designed from the ground up.'

stonking 35-bit/844kHz DAC. Noise and distortion are minimised by keeping the signal digital right up to the speaker terminals. The control app offers the ability to sync two or more players (up to a 'mansion-friendly' 37 units) together for a party.

Into the Vault

Bluesound's Vault (£800) is a streaming music player, vault and CD-ripper with a whisper-quiet 1TB HDD. A 2TB version will set you back £1,000. It offers the same DAC as the Pownode and will rip simultaneously to HD and MP3. While it does require an Ethernet connection to a router, Banks says that the real benefit of the Vault is it allows you to enjoy hi-res audio without involving a computer.

For a one-stop solution, Bluesound offers the Pulse, a player/stereo speaker with three drive units. Retailing for £600, it's tuned by Paul Barton of speaker marque PSB. And for a more powerful sonic experience, the company offers a 2.1 sub/sat system, the £900 Duo.

Banks believes the all-encompassing nature

of Bluesound's system is good for consumers: 'We've developed our own operating system and can enhance it as we please. This makes us highly responsive to users' requests.'

Look out for an in-depth review in *HCC* soon.



The Bluesound family of wireless streaming kit

Award-winning home cinemas

At Cyberhomes our home cinemas aren't just about the amazing picture and jaw-dropping sound. We also implement the lighting, the seating, the intuitive control system from Savant, Crestron or Control4, and so much more.

For details visit www.cyberhomes.co.uk/hcc



Cyberhomes
the smarter choice



CUSTOM
ELECTRONIC
DESIGN &
INSTALLATION
ASSOCIATION



Home cinema design and installation • Lighting control systems • Multi-room audio and video • Home automation
CCTV and security • Data and communication networks • Occupancy simulation • Heating and air conditioning

0845 094 2718

hello@cyberhomes.co.uk

www.cyberhomes.co.uk

SONY

Seeing is believing

True 4K Home Cinema is
closer than you think



Experience movies in a whole new dimension with incredible, cinematic 4K detail, at home. At over four times the resolution of Full HD, see pictures come to life with sharper-than-ever colour and enhanced contrast for viewing you'd expect from the professional screen.

Get closer with our latest 4K Home Cinema projector, the VPL-VW300ES.

Find out more at pro.sony.eu/True4K

4K

DIARY

Our calendar ensures that you don't miss out...

→ DECEMBER



12: The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies
Hit your local cinema to catch the finale to Peter Jackson's epic three-part adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's classic children's book.
www.warnerbros.co.uk

15: Sin City: A Dame to Kill For
Ready for a trip to the seedy side of town? Robert Rodriguez and Frank Miller's long-awaited comic book sequel arrives on DVD, Blu-ray and 3D Blu-ray today.
www.lionsgatefilms.co.uk

25: Christmas Day
Wishing everyone a very Merry Christmas from Team HCC – whether you're sitting down to watch the *Doctor Who* special, or simply waiting for the Boxing Day sales to pick up an AV bargain.

26: Exodus: Gods and Kings
A plague on the heads of all those who don't visit the cinema to see Christian Bale and Joel Edgerton star in director Ridley Scott's epic re-telling of the story of Moses.
www.fox.co.uk

→ JANUARY

02: The Woman in Black: Angel of Death
New year, new chills. The spook-tacular sequel to Hammer's 2012 horror smash will be haunting cinemas across the UK from today.
www.hammerfilms.com

08: Taken 3

Liam Neeson brings the pain to UK theatres once again in this action sequel, which sees ex-government agent Bryan Mills falsely accused of murder. Let's hope it improves on the rather lacklustre *Taken 2*.
www.fox.co.uk

12: Boardwalk Empire: The Complete Fifth Season
The final season of HBO's acclaimed Prohibition-era crime series makes its bow on DVD and Blu-ray. Will Nucky be lucky and make it out alive? There's only one way to find out...
www.hbouk.com

15: HCC #243
The next issue of your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands today, packed with hardware tests, features, outspoken opinion and in-depth software reviews.
www.homecinemachoice.com

Loewe's 4K resurrection

Premium AV brand is the first to deliver an all-4K/UHD TV range

Reports of Loewe's death have been greatly exaggerated. From what we saw at a recent unveiling of its new televisions at suitably swanky Harrods, the German AV brand has not only pulled back from what looked like the brink of disaster after securing new investment in April, but seems to be in good health.

It almost goes without saying given Loewe's design-focused heritage that the brand's four new TV series – the entry level Art, step-up Connect, high-end Reference and flagship Masterpiece – all look absolutely gorgeous, combining chic minimalist designs with premium build quality and a degree of customisation.

Much more surprising is the fact that every new Loewe TV (even the entry-level 40in Art) sports a native 4K resolution. Loewe is the first brand to deliver an all-4K TV range, a fact that speaks volumes about its new-found desire to be associated with the cutting edge of picture and sound tech.

In another unusual but welcome move, all of the new sets use essentially the same picture systems, built around a combination of VA-type LED panels, local dimming controls, Active 3D playback, and proprietary picture processing that includes 4K upscaling for HD and standard-definition sources.

Staring at an upscale of the *Avatar* Blu-ray suggested that this upscaling system really is decent. And from a typical 4K demo of pretty views and nature footage it looks as if Loewe already knows its way around native 4K sources, too.

All of Loewe's new flatscreens feature 4K-friendly v2.0 HDMI ports capable of handling native 4K/60p feeds, and can play HEVC streams such as Netflix's 4K service. The Netflix app wasn't actually online during our preview, but while nothing could be said officially we got the distinct impression its arrival wasn't far away...



Mark Hüsches: 'We're returning Loewe to its 'family business' feel to create the sort of TV experience the brand was built on'

Family business

With Loewe also building powerful front-firing speaker systems into its TVs' bezels and promising that the screens will control connected AV systems featuring speaker packages, other Loewe TVs and even home automation technology, the brand seems more switched on than ever before to the demands of modern high-end AV users.

It's a situation CEO Mark Hüsches puts down to the company's new structure: 'We're returning Loewe to its 'family business' feel, creating an environment where the different parts of the business can communicate more freely and easily. This way we can create the sort of premium TV experiences the Loewe brand was built on.'

The Art and Connect ranges will launch first, by year end, priced from £1,300 and £2,100 for the 40in and 55in Arts (a 48in Art will arrive in 2015), and £2,000 and £2,800 for the 40in and 55in Connects.



Lined with Silver



Monitor Audio says that it has 'turbo-charged' its Radius home cinema speaker system with the addition of its

Silver Series W12 subwoofer (pictured). As well as that 500W bass bin, the R270HT12 5.1 package is comprised of a brace of Radius 270 L/R floorstanders, two Radius 90 two-way monitors, and the Radius 200 centre speaker. In order to add even more grunt, all of the speakers utilise C-CAM bass drivers. The R270HT12 system will set you back £2,350 and comes in gloss white or gloss black finishes.
www.monitoraudio.co.uk

Atmos-pheric Blu-ray



Over in the States, Warner Bros has revealed that it will be revisiting sci-fi smash *Gravity* on Blu-ray. Set to hit US shelves on February 10, the most exciting aspect of the new 'Diamond Lux Edition' is the news that it will include a Dolby Atmos soundtrack – and even if you don't have the required kit, the base Dolby TrueHD 7.1 mix should still improve on the original platter's 5.1 track. Our only slight concern is that the studio has remained tight-lipped on whether or not the new set will include a 3D version of the film.
www.warnerbros.com

Universally speaking



Arcam has bolstered its line-up of home cinema kit with the arrival of the UDP411, its latest universal disc player. Promising to embrace music playback just as readily as it does movies, the £1,200 deck utilises a TI/Burr Brown PCM1794 DAC and 'high-precision re-clocking system' for an audio performance that the brand says is comparable to that of an dedicated audiophile CD player. It also offers 4K upscaling from any video source (disc or network), balanced audio outputs, Wi-Fi/network ports and RS232 control.
www.arcam.co.uk

This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 Sony offers free 4K movies
Sony is offering free 4K movies to anyone who buys a selected Bravia 4K/Ultra HD TV before 24 December this year. Consumers get to choose the five from *The Amazing Spider-Man* and its sequel, *Moneyball*, *Premium Rush*, *Total Recall* (2012), *Salt*, *Ghostbusters*, *The Patriot*, *Battle Los Angeles* and *Captain Phillips*, which arrive on a pre-loaded HDD. However, the DRM used means that the films will only be accessible until 30 September, 2016.

2 Speak up...
Following complaints about sections of inaudible dialogue in his sci-fi epic *Interstellar*, director Christopher Nolan has defended the mix, calling it 'adventurous and creative' and hoping that 'people can appreciate the experience for what it is.'

3 Smart TV milestone
Samsung's Smart TV platform has reached a new milestone in the UK, clocking up more than 1.5million weekly unique visitors – representing an impressive 50 per cent increase in the number of users over the past nine months.

4 Virgin plays with UKTV
From early December Virgin TV customers will be able to enjoy on-demand content from all 10 of UKTV's channels (Dave, Watch, Alibi, Gold, Drama, Eden, Good Food, Home, Really and Yesterday). The content will be available under UKTV's new digital brand UKTV Play, with entire series of shows like *Crackanory* and *David Attenborough's Natural Curiosities* added to Virgin Media's library of Box Sets.

5 The (Nu)Force be with you
Projector specialist Optoma will be branching out in the New Year following its acquisition of high-end audio company NuForce Inc. The new owner says that a 'streamlined range' of NuForce products will arrive in 2015 in the form of home cinema kit designed to complement its projectors, wireless audio systems and earphones. And perhaps the deal will see greater emphasis placed on the speakers in Optoma projectors.

6 BSkyB is no more
Rupert Murdoch's popular pay TV empire is ditching 'British' and 'Broadcasting' from its name in order to reflect its continental interests, following the company's £7bn acquisition of Sky Italia and Sky Deutschland. 'It's not about the British taking over, it is about bringing the three Skys together,' says Sky boss Jeremy Darroch.

7 Bend it like Samsung
Samsung has teamed up with videogame manufacturer Konami to create bespoke options for curved TVs in its new *PES 2015* football game. Available via a download for the Xbox One, PS4 and PC versions of the game, the upgrade includes a 'Fan View' mode that claims to offer special camera angles that are 'perfectly suited' for use with curved TVs.

8 Sound idea
A University of Southampton researcher has developed a loudspeaker system designed to help people with hearing problems listen to a TV without altering the sound for other viewers, as disputes over telly volume affect '1 in 10 households.' The highly directional array creates a single audio 'hot spot' in a room and is designed to compensate for the hearing loss of a 70-year-old adult (about 15dB at 3kHz).

9 Vodafone plans for pay TV
Mobile communications vendor Vodafone has revealed that it will be following in the footsteps of rival providers BT, EE and TalkTalk in entering the fixed broadband and pay TV market in the UK next Spring.

10 Sharp sells TV division
Troubled Japanese TV maker Sharp has agreed to offload its European AV division to Slovakian TV manufacturer UMC (Universal Media Corporation). As part of the deal, Sharp will support the design and development of LCD televisions produced and sold by UMC under the Sharp brand.



PREMIERE

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

Small screen Deadites

Cult horror favourite *The Evil Dead* will be making the jump to TV in 2015. Creator Sam Raimi is lined up to write and direct the 10-episode *Ash v. Evil Dead* series for Starz, which Bruce Campbell in the cast.

Marvel unveils Phase 3



Marvel has outlined its plans for Phase 3 of its 'cinematic universe'. Running between 2016 and 2019, the nine films will include new sequels for *Captain America*, *Thor* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*, plus a two-part *Avengers* epic entitled *Avengers: Infinity War*.

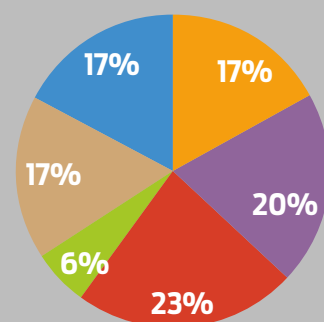
Odyssey to end on TV

Syfy has revealed that it will be taking a journey into the depths of space with a TV miniseries adaptation of Arthur C. Clarke's novel *3001: The Final Odyssey*. The adaptation of the fourth and final book in Clarke's 'Space Odyssey' series will be scripted by *Collateral* writer Stuart Beattie and produced by Ridley Scott and David W. Zucker.

WE ASKED...

Which brand of AVR do you use in your home cinema setup?


Denon ■ Onkyo ■ Pioneer
Sony ■ Yamaha ■ Other



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

Mind-blowing

Lucy → Universal Pictures →
All-region BD/R2 DVD

A full-page photograph of Scarlett Johansson as Lucy. She is standing in a dimly lit hallway with warm, yellowish lighting. She has short, wavy blonde hair and is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. She is wearing a white t-shirt under a light green button-down shirt that is open and draped over her shoulders. She is also wearing dark jeans with a black belt. In her right hand, she holds a black handgun, and in her left hand, she holds another black handgun. The background shows a hallway with doors and lights, slightly out of focus.

It may have been debunked by scientists, but the notion that we use only ten per cent of our brain capacity remains as popular as ever in Hollywood. Luc Besson's *Lucy* stars Scarlett Johansson as the eponymous drug mule who begins manifesting strange powers after she becomes infected by a synthetic narcotic that opens up the full potential of her grey matter. Arriving on Blu-ray and DVD on January 12, this high-concept action flick promises plenty of AV thrills and comes accompanied by two *Making of...* featurettes in its hi-def incarnation.



THE END OF EARTH WILL NOT BE THE END OF US.

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF **THE DARK KNIGHT TRILOGY** AND **INCEPTION**

INTERSTELLAR

IN CINEMAS
NOVEMBER 7



LEGENDARY



[FACEBOOK.COM/INTERSTELLARMOVIEUK](https://facebook.com/interstellarmovieuk)

#interstellar

WARNER BROS. PICTURES
©2014 Warner Bros. Inc. All Rights Reserved



TO FIND OUT HOW TO WIN
CHECK OUT KEF.com/gb

KEF
INNOVATORS IN SOUND

HIGH RESOLUTION SOUND THAT IS OUT OF THIS WORLD

WIN A TRIP FOR TWO ADULTS TO ICELAND WITH
KEF AND **WARNER BROS.** OR A STUNNING
HOME THEATRE SPEAKER SET

Like all modern movies, half the pleasure of watching the highly anticipated film *Interstellar* lies in the soundtrack. And to enjoy the full benefit at home, you need a system that envelopes you in the same high definition soundscape you experience in the cinema.

That means KEF. Which is why, to celebrate the release of *Interstellar* (in cinemas Nov 7), we've not only teamed up with Warner Bros. to give away a dream trip to Iceland, taking in the Northern Lights and the movie locations, but we're also offering a chance to win a KEF E Series home theatre speaker package, worth £900.00.*

*Terms and Conditions apply. To see these visit kef.com/gb

Sony: aiming high with hi-res audio

The Japanese corp's gambit to put better-than-CD quality audio centre stage appears to be paying off. **Steve May** talks to Ichiro Takagi, President of Sony's Video and Sound business, about his sonic revolution

HIGH-RESOLUTION AUDIO HAS become the new anthem of the music world. Against all odds, download stores are springing up to offer master-quality files, galvanizing an entire industry to produce higher-performance hardware from systems to speakers. The acronym on everyone's lips is HRA. But the buzz hasn't always been so loud.

Rewind a year and Sony was a solitary advocate, trying to persuade a seemingly lethargic music industry that there was an audience for those extra digital bits left on the recording studio floor. But with no physical media standard to rally behind, it seemed few seemed to be listening. High-res audio looked to be the preserve of the eclectic, unheard by the mainstream. Yet today the swing to higher quality sonics is as apparent as the evolution of TV from Full HD to 4K, and Sony's focus on hi-res audio is informing everything from its AV receivers, beginning with the entry-level STR-DN1050, through to standalone wireless audio systems like the SRS-X9. HRA has even impacted its mobile phone business.

Two-channel audio, it seems, has finally caught up with the fidelity offered by multichannel sound systems like Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA.

A quick recap...

High-resolution audio is essentially an umbrella term for anything which offers better fidelity than the 16-bit/44.1kHz standard established for CD. Typically, it's 24-bit/96kHz, although this can vary. The bit-depth effectively relates to the resolution of the music, while the sampling frequency is indicative of the accuracy of the digital-to-analogue process, and more often than not is determined by the tools available to audio engineers at the time the music was recorded. It's delivered in a variety of codecs and wrappers. No one size fits all.

In Japan, Sony's distinctive yellow and black High-Res Audio logo can be found on products from several Japanese manufacturers. This cross-company initiative followed a request by the Japanese Audio Society, which comprises audio

Sony's AV receivers are now part of the HRA stable, touting their support for FLAC, WAV, ALAC and DSD files





manufacturers as well as music services, to give free usage rights to the logo to Society members. Sony, it seems, was happy to oblige; anything to drive awareness.

A recent survey, conducted by Sony Europe and hi-res music download service Qobuz, reveals a surprisingly high level of awareness amongst consumers. 84 per cent of buyers say they'd choose a higher-resolution format of an album over a compressed alternative when presented with a choice.

Perhaps more significantly, sales of high-resolution album downloads have begun to exceed lower fidelity files. Qobuz reports that in September, sales of tracks and albums in hi-res audio formats surpassed those of lower resolution downloads for the first time. Total HRA sales accounted for 53 per cent of all its downloads, compared to 11 per cent just five months earlier. Qobuz says it now offers 26,000 albums in better-than-CD quality format.

The man who says yes to hi-res

Ichiro Takagi is responsible for all things AV at Sony. As President of Sony's newly-formed Video and Sound Business Group, created after the company hived out its TV business into an autonomous business division, he oversees everything from soundbars to headphones, conducting Sony's high-res audio business with all the enthusiastic vigour of Seiji Ozawa. At an exclusive briefing, Takagi-san confided to me that HRA has effectively

re-energized Sony's audio component division. 'Two years ago I asked my team to focus on high resolution. The time had come to make an industry,' he declared.

While the technical challenges of Ultra HD continue to thwart 4K software availability, high-resolution audio content availability has transformed from a dribble to a torrent. 'We started high-resolution music sales in Japan last year with

'Sales of high-resolution album downloads have begun to exceed lower fidelity files for the first time'

an initial launch catalogue from Sony Music of 600 titles,' Takagi-san says. 'Now, one year later, we offer more than 2,000 titles, including popular music releases, niche jazz, classical music, anime soundtracks as well as US and worldwide pop. So the choice is growing more and more.' And it's no longer just Sony supporting high-resolution audio. Japanese service provider Onkyo e-music and others have joined in. 'We have now set up a portal site which can be accessed via 54 countries, and offers downloads from HD Tracks, Qobuz and many others. There are many services offering hi-res audio. We >

Ichiro Takagi, President of Sony's Video and Sound department, enjoying his HRA Walkman



CEO Kazuo Hirai has broken down the barriers between the company's music, games and electronics groups

HI-RES HEAVEN?

Aim your browser at these online download sites



Qobuz

The French download giant launched in the UK over the Summer, offering over 4,000 titles at 24-bit (the majority 96kHz but some at 192kHz) and typically priced at £16 per album. www.qobuz.com

HDTracks

Another new arrival to these shores and with a similar model to Qobuz, HDTracks provides HRA files at up to 24-bit/352kHz, and has a free 'hi-res music sampler' allowing you to try before you buy. www.hdtracks.co.uk

Linn Records

The audiophile music store from the UK label (part of the Linn Products brand) serves up FLAC and ALAC downloads at Studio Master (24-bit) or CD (16-bit) quality, plus MP3. Note that the Studio Master catalogue now only features Linn Records artists. www.linnrecords.com

Bleep

Selling both physical (CD/vinyl/cassette!) and digital versions of an eclectic mix of tunes, Bleep's 24-bit catalogue is exclusively WAV files. FLAC downloads are 16-bit. Note that you'll sometimes get a free MP3 download with your purchase. www.bleep.com

Sony's £600 SRS-X9 speaker is leading its hi-res audio charge



estimate that there are now more than 300,000 titles available from three major labels, Sony Music, Universal and Warner Bros. It's getting bigger and bigger, since the 15 months or so that we launched our Sony Music service.'

It's taken a little time, explains Takagi-san, but record companies are gradually beginning to focus on this new business. 'They continue to sell CDs and have made new revenue from streaming audio services, but on top of that they now have high-res downloads to bring in new income.'

Sony's hi-res audio focus is indicative of a restructured company, and Sony CEO Kazuo Hirai's streamlined direction. 'Before Hirai-san, there was a silo mentality at Sony,' reveals Takagi. 'Our music and entertainment groups were segregated; games and electronics separated.' Takagi cites new cooperation with Sony Mobile as an example of this gadget Glasnost. The brand's latest smartphone, the Xperia Z3, is part of the Sony Hi-Res Audio product family. 'Group synergy is now everywhere. Hirai-san's policy is to get the people's ideas directly to the CEO. He really wants to establish a bottom-up type management. Sony has changed rapidly.'

The Xperia smartphone features DSEE HX (Digital Sound Enhancement Engine) technology, used to upscale compressed MP3 and AAC audio tracks. It was developed by Takagi's team, and brings genuine high-res audio performance to the phone. Takagi sees such technology-sharing as complimentary rather than competitive. 'We see the usage of a smartphone and a Walkman music player as totally

different. One is an audio device, the other a telecommunications device. They are two different animals, but we share technologies and we share knowhow. Our Hi-Res Audio Walkman is designed for users to reach their content very easily. It also offers much better sound – sorry Xperia!'

Takagi views HRA downloads as just part of an ongoing audio revolution. Indeed, he's equally enthused about the popularity of streaming music services. 'They're a good thing! Now everybody can get access to their favourite music, anywhere, anytime. And it means we can sell music devices to those people. It's all beneficial to us.'

High-resolution audio has also enabled Sony to reinvent its AV business, he says. 'We now have tons of knowhow for high-fidelity audio, since we started this business six years ago. High resolution appeals to all types of listeners, from those looking for high-performance headphones to buyers of hi-fi components that use a high-fidelity DAC and hard disc player. We've even introduced high-resolution loudspeakers with dual super-tweeters. This is a new innovation developed by us.'

It seems that a shift to hi-res audio is very much in tune with the newly restructured Sony Corp. 'When our financial situation took a downturn, we had to change,' confides Takagi-san. 'We had to get out from this kind of hell. We knew we had to differentiate ourselves from others. We always make things differently, devices as well as technologies. Uniqueness comes from the spirit – and that Sony spirit is very much alive. It's everywhere.' ■



JustAddPopcorn

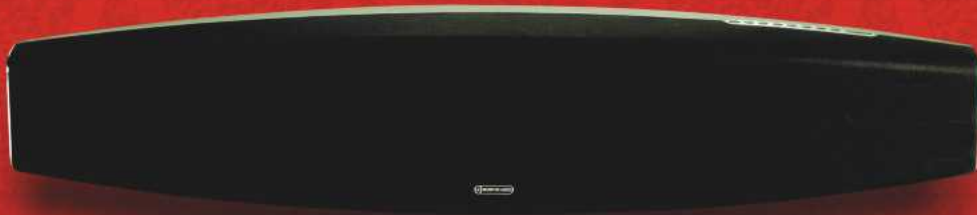
'Seamlessly integrating technology into your home'

For more information or to book a consultation visit:
www.justaddpopcorn.co.uk or call 01424 870763



- Bespoke Cinema Rooms
- Media Rooms
- Gaming Rooms
- Garage Conversions
- Loft Conversions
- Multi Room Audio & Video
- Control Systems
- Lighting & Heating Solutions

MAKE ROOM FOR THE TREE



"Sometimes you get a soundbar that's cut from a different cloth, taking a more refined approach to design and sound quality. The ASB-2 from Monitor Audio is one of those."

Home Cinema Choice, December 2013



2.1 SPEAKER SYSTEM • 3D SURROUND EFFECT • 3 HDMI INPUTS • AIRPLAY® • AIRSTREAM DIRECT • DLNA®

SPACE SAVING SOUND BAR NONE

ASB-2: sound, surround and streaming, all-in-one. This Christmas make space for the tree not the speakers. 40 years of Award Winning speaker technology in the world's most complete soundbar

DIRECT DEBIT SUBSCRIPTIONS UK ONLY

Yes, I would like to subscribe to Home Cinema Choice

- ☐ **Print + Digital:** £12.74 every 3 months
(**SAVE 28%** on shop price + **SAVE 74%** on Digital Download + **FREE GIFT**)
- ☐ **Print:** £10.49 every 3 months (**SAVE 28%** on shop price + **FREE GIFT**)


YOUR DETAILS MUST BE COMPLETED

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms..... Initial..... Surname.....
Address
Postcode Country
Tel Mobile.....
Email D.O.B

I WOULD LIKE TO SEND A GIFT TO:

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms..... Initial..... Surname.....
Address
Postcode Country

INSTRUCTIONS TO YOUR BANK/BUILDING SOCIETY

Originator's reference 422562 
Name of bank.....
Address of bank.....
Postcode
Account holder.....
Signature..... Date
Sort code Account number

Instructions to your bank or building society: Please pay MyTimeMedia Ltd. Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with MyTimeMedia Ltd and if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

Reference Number (official use only)

Please note that banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions from some types of account.

CARD PAYMENTS & OVERSEAS

Yes, I would like to subscribe to Home Cinema Choice, for 1 year (13 issues) with a one-off payment

UK ONLY:

- ☐ **Print + Digital:** £53.49
(**SAVE 24%** on shop price + **SAVE 74%** on Digital + **FREE GIFT**)
- ☐ **Print:** £44.49 (**SAVE 24%** on shop price + **FREE GIFT**)

EUROPE & ROW:

- ☐ **EU Print + Digital:** £72.00
☐ **EU Print:** £63.00
☐ **ROW Print + Digital:** £74.00
☐ **ROW Print:** £65.00

PAYMENT DETAILS

☐ Postal Order/Cheque ☐ Visa/MasterCard ☐ Maestro
Please make cheques payable to MyTimeMedia Ltd and write code X262 on the back
Cardholder's name.....
Card no: (Maestro)
Valid from..... Expiry date..... Maestro issue no.....
Signature..... Date.....

Offer ends 8th January 2015. MyTimeMedia Ltd & Home Cinema Choice may contact you with information about our other products and services. If you DO NOT wish to be contacted by MyTimeMedia Ltd & Home Cinema Choice please tick here: ☐ Email ☐ Post ☐ Phone. If you DO NOT wish to be contacted by carefully chosen 3rd parties, please tick here: ☐ Post ☐ Phone. If you wish to be contacted by email by carefully chosen 3rd parties, please tick here: ☐ Email

**POST THIS FORM TO: HOME CINEMA CHOICE
SUBSCRIPTIONS, TOWER HOUSE, SOVEREIGN PARK,
MARKET HARBOROUGH, LEICS LE16 9EF**

**HURRY
OFFER
CLOSES
JANUARY 8
2015**



PRINT + DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION

Free HDMI switch SV-1620 worth £49.99*

13 issues **delivered to your door**

Save up to **28% off the shop price**

Download each new issue to your device

A **74% discount** on your Digital subscription

Access your subscription on **multiple devices**

Access to the **Online Archive** dating back to August 2011

Exclusive discount on all orders at myhobbystore.co.uk



PRINT SUBSCRIPTION

Free HDMI switch SV-1620 worth £49.99*

13 issues **delivered to your door**

Save up to **28% off the shop price**

Exclusive discount on all orders at myhobbystore.co.uk

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

DIGITAL
SUBSCRIPTIONS
AVAILABLE ONLINE!

Receive a **WORTH £49.99***
**One For All™ Smart
HDMI Switch SV1620***
when you subscribe today



**'A potential life-saver
for your AV setup'**

This month you can get this fantastic One For All SV1620 Smart HDMI Switch completely free with a year's subscription to *Home Cinema Choice**. A potentially life-saving device for your AV setup, it enables you to connect up to four devices to just one HDMI input on your TV, and uses intelligent switching technology that automatically selects the source you powered up last. The Smart HDMI Switch is compatible with Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD audio, plus Full HD and 3D video,



and sports a slender design for a snug installation. To find out more about One For All and for full device specifications visit:
www.oneforall.co.uk

TERMS & CONDITIONS: Offer ends 8th January 2015. *UK Direct Debit offer only. Please see www.homecinemachoice.com/terms for full terms & conditions.

SUBSCRIBE SECURELY ONLINE

 www.subscription.co.uk/hccl/x262

CALL OUR ORDER LINE

 **0844 543 8200 (quote ref X262)**

Lines open weekdays 8am - 9.30pm & Saturday 8am - 4pm

BT landline calls to 0844 numbers will cost no more than 5p per minute. Calls from mobiles usually cost more.

HCC MOVIE AWARDS 2014



Which film soundtrack packed the biggest punch? Which release went the extra mile with extra features? Which HD restoration really blew us away? All this, and much more, is revealed in our annual Movie Awards, where we cast a critical eye over the disc releases of the last year. From blockbuster sci-fi flicks and animations to TV classics and cult comedies, these Blu-ray and DVD platters deserve a place on your shelf...





The first-rate 1080p visuals ensure this time-bending sci-fi cruises to success on Blu-ray



BEST PICTURE QUALITY

WINNER

EDGE OF TOMORROW

The 1080p AVC encode of Doug Liman's shot-on-35mm sci-fi flick doesn't put a mech-boot wrong, portraying the (mostly) down-to-Earth colour palette with consummate ease and challenging your display with its sumptuous black tones. It's the fine details in the image that deserve the highest praise, however. When Cruise and co are battling beasties on the beach, you'll be blinking grains of sand out of your eyes for days.

ALSO NOMINATED

TRANSFORMERS: AGE OF EXTINCTION

Bursting with detail and colour, Michael Bay's bot-tastic sequel is prime demo fodder

GRAVITY

Intricately detailed 2D and 3D visuals ensure that this hi-def platter is a space-age treat

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

The SFX-heavy blockbuster hits your screen with saturated colours and inky blacks





BEST SFX

WINNER

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

Every sci-fi worth its salt can take you to other worlds and fly you into the heart of whizz-bang space battles, but how many can make a gun-toting rodent (Rocket) and his walking houseplant muscle (Groot) every bit as believable as their human co-stars?

ALSO NOMINATED

GRAVITY

Framestore takes you into orbit with its stellar visual effects

THE HOBBIT: THE DESOLATION OF SMAUG

Good enough to make you believe that dragons really do exist

GODZILLA

The king of the monsters regains his cinematic crown



BEST 3D BLU-RAY

WINNER

GRAVITY 3D

Like *Avatar* before it, *Gravity* was conceived from the ground up as a stereoscopic film. And it shows. Every shot here is crafted to get the most from its 3D presentation, resulting in an absorbing image that flicks easily between largescale vistas and cramped claustrophobia.

ALSO NOMINATED

HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON 2 3D

There are no hiccups where this stereoscopic sequel is concerned

SIN CITY: A DAME TO KILL FOR 3D

Comic book adaptation's stylish 3D visuals are sin-sational

NEED FOR SPEED 3D

A stunning 3D presentation that puts the super in supercars

BEST PACKAGING

Withnail and I: Limited Edition Boxset



Getting a brand-new 2K restoration of your favourite film on Blu-ray is welcome. Getting it in an oversized limited edition boxset, along with a 2K restoration of the director's follow-up film and an exclusive 200-page coffee table book packed with new writing about the movie is even better. But the *Withnail and I* goodness doesn't stop there! An even more limited version (just 1,000 copies) allowed fans to personalise their copy with a choice of box art and quote from the cult comedy, plus their name and the limited edition number emblazoned on the rear!



BEST REMASTER

WINNER

CAMERA OBSCURA: THE WALERIAN BOROWCZYK COLLECTION

Arrow Films rewrote the BD rulebook with this celebration of director Walerian Borowczyk, going as far seeking the assistance of film fans through the use of crowdfunding to finance a 2K restoration of his masterpiece, *Goto, Isle of Love*. The results were absolutely staggering and prove what's possible when a label engages with its audience.

ALSO NOMINATED

DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI

Who knew a silent movie could ever look this impressive?

THE UMBRELLAS OF CHERBOURG

A superb restoration makes this musical sing in hi-def

ROBOCOP

4K spit 'n' polish brings the shine back to this futuristic lawman



BEST DVD EXCLUSIVE

WINNER

VIDEO NASTIES: THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE – PART 2

Nucleus Films founders Jake West and Marc Morris lift the lid on the controversies and moral panic that surrounded the James Ferman era of the British Board of Film Classification in a fascinating documentary backed up by a vast array of memorable extras.

ALSO NOMINATED

OUT OF THE UNKNOWN

Comprehensive boxset for the celebrated BBC sci-fi anthology series

RED SHIFT

Brilliant and baffling sci-fi drama merits revisiting on DVD

DOCTOR WHO: THE MOONBASE

Incomplete 1967 serial given new life via animated reconstructions



BEST WORLD CINEMA

WINNER

THE RAID 2

Writer-director Gareth Evans' Indonesian crime saga is one of those rare sequels that exceeds all expectations. The story is bigger, the stakes are higher, the action is more spectacular and it packs a knockout punch with its Blu-ray picture and sound quality.

ALSO NOMINATED

CAMERA OBSCURA: THE WALERIAN BOROWCZYK COLLECTION

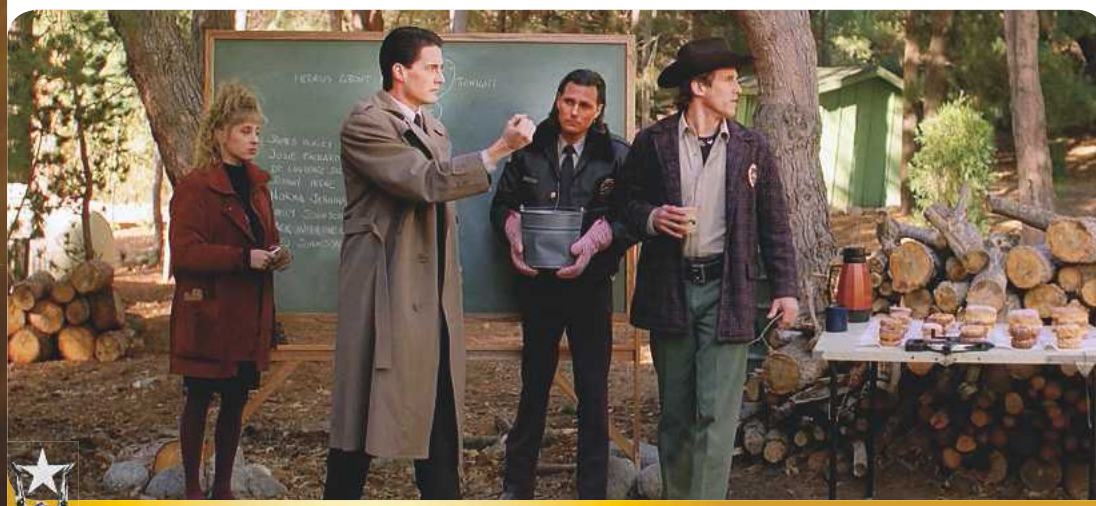
A spectacular hi-def celebration of the underrated Polish filmmaker

DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI

This landmark in silent horror shines brighter than ever on Blu-ray

JACQUES TATI: ESSENTIAL

Legendary French funnyman's Blu-ray boxset is *très magnifique*!



BEST TV BOXSET

WINNER

TWIN PEAKS: THE ENTIRE MYSTERY

The Blu-ray debut of David Lynch's 24-year-old TV sensation is proof that good things really do come to those who wait. In addition to beautifully restored episodes and sympathetically remixed 7.1 audio, this set also improves significantly on the earlier standalone release of the cinematic prequel *...Fire Walk with Me* and comes loaded with an expansive (and fittingly eclectic) archive of supplementary features. The perfect primer to the upcoming new series...

ALSO NOMINATED

HANNIBAL; SEASON TWO

Dig deeper into this crime series with the extras-laden BD boxset

OUT OF THE UNKNOWN

An all-encompassing celebration of this landmark series

GAME OF THRONES: SEASON THREE

The largest jewel in HBO's lineup continues to dazzle on Blu-ray

BOOK OF THE YEAR

Alien: The Archive – The Ultimate Guide to the Classic Movies



There have already been more books written about the making of the *Alien* franchise than there are actual films, but don't let that put you off this remarkable tome. Bursting at the seams with hundreds of rare sketches, promo stills and behind-the-scenes photos unearthed in the musty 20th Century Fox archives, this 315-page colossus manages to discover new aspects of all four movies to explore. Even if you've been through every extra in the *Alien Anthology* Blu-ray boxset, you should add this to your library.

Optimus Prime celebrates being first out of the blocks with Dolby Atmos on BD



BEST AUDIO QUALITY

WINNER

TRANSFORMERS: AGE OF EXTINCTION

Michael Bay's *Transformers* movies have already delivered reference-quality lossless audio on Blu-ray – this latest sequel goes one step further. The first disc to feature a next-gen Dolby Atmos mix, it gives

a tantalising glimpse into the possible future of home cinema audio – a world of even more immersive, coherent and dynamic soundscapes. Simply sensational.



ALSO NOMINATED

GODZILLA

The DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix drives home the scenes of monster mayhem with its stonking LFE

GRAVITY

There may be no sound in a vacuum, but this track uses every trick in the book to wrap you up in the action

LONE SURVIVOR

Shock and awe is the order of the day with this mix's peerless positional effects and steering

From plastic bricks to hi-def tricks...



BEST ANIMATION

WINNER

THE LEGO MOVIE

While the popular toy it's based on revolves entirely around the power of your imagination, no creative thinking is needed to see why *The LEGO Movie* deserves to romp away with this award. Building on the film's immense box office success, the Blu-ray dazzled us with the vibrancy of its hi-def visuals, enveloped us with its inventive, action-packed DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 mix and kept us entertained afterwards with its fun extras.

ALSO NOMINATED

HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON 2

Bigger and better than the first, DreamWorks' spectacular sequel aims high on Blu-ray

FROZEN

Disney's wintry smash hit arrives on a gorgeous HD platter with an audio track that gets the most from its musical numbers

THE WIND RISES

In his final flight of fancy, anime legend Hayao Miyazaki shows that great things can be done with a mono soundmix

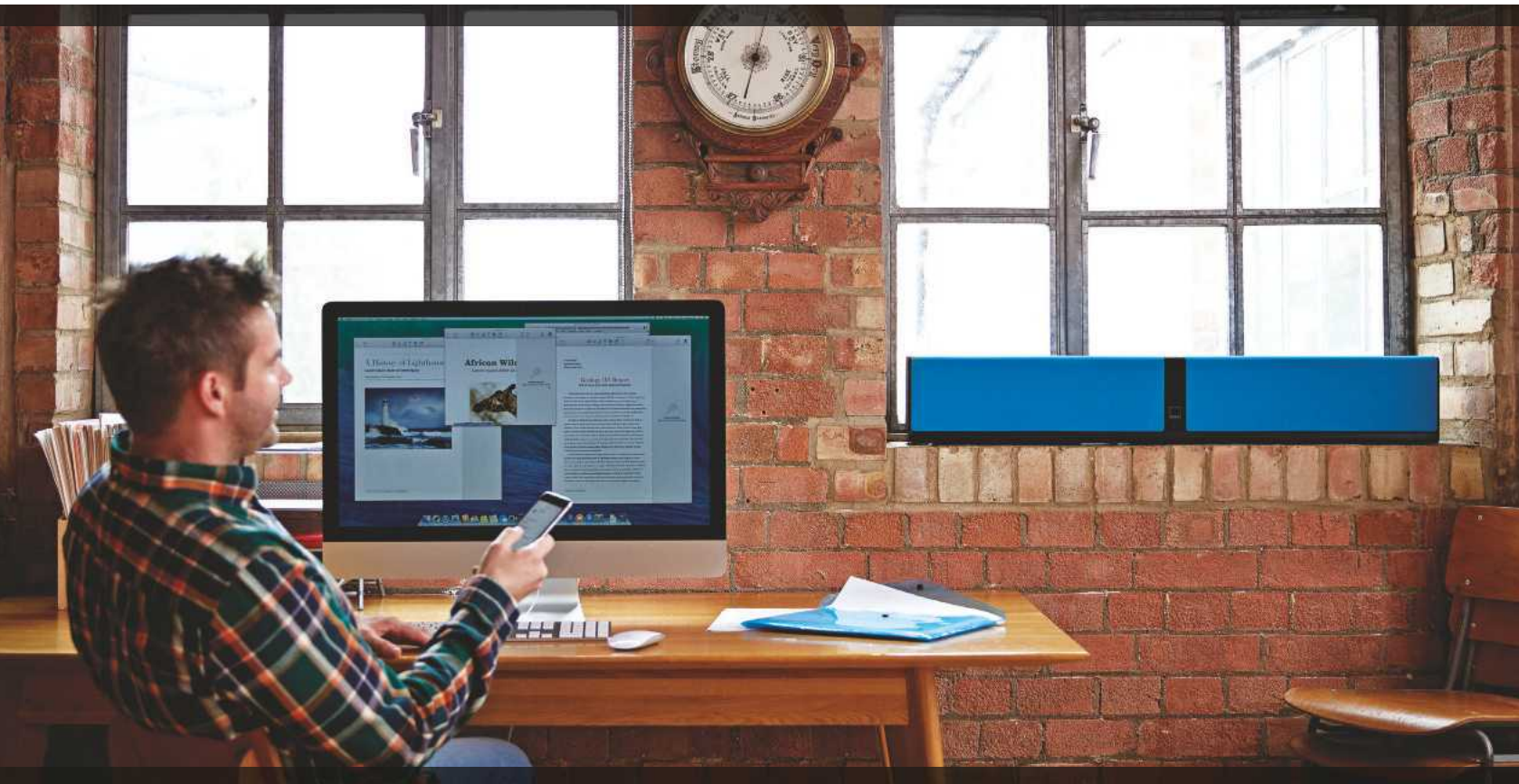




IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

The Sound of Freedom

Designed by people who've devoted their lives to the pursuit of audio excellence



DALI KUBIK is a series of wireless speakers that combine DALI's legendary loudspeaker heritage with state-of-the-art digital amplification.

The new DALI KUBIK ONE and KUBIK FREE allow you to listen wirelessly to your music and movies at an incredible level of sonic detail.

These extraordinary sound systems give you the freedom to listen from any device, anywhere in your home - phones, tablets and laptops all swiftly and effortlessly connect.



Learn more about the KUBIKs at www.dalikubik.com

Technical specifications: Bluetooth APT-X wireless connectivity, Class D amplifier, wide range of inputs (3.5mm mini jack, RCA, Optical, USB), interchangeable colour grilles.



BEST EXTRA

WINNER

SCREAM QUEENS: HORROR HEROINES EXPOSED (GRADUATION DAY)

This candid feature-length documentary offers a refreshingly female perspective on the horror genre, as some of the biggest stars in the business discuss the industry and the role of a 'scream queen'.

ALSO NOMINATED

GRAVITY: MISSION CONTROL (GRAVITY)

Everything you need to know about the creation of this modern classic

THE MISSING PIECES (TWIN PEAKS: THE ENTIRE MYSTERY)

Two decades later and the legendary deleted scenes are finally ours!

WORKPRINT (THE 'BURBS)

Director Joe Dante digs up a fan-pleasing alternate cut from his attic



BEST DEMO

WINNER

STREET FIGHT (CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER)

Inspired by Michael Mann's *Heat*, this run-and-gun sequence allows the DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix to show off its first-rate surround capabilities while the AVC 2.40:1 1080p visuals keep pace with the frantic action. An AV experience fit for superheroes.

ALSO NOMINATED

SHUTTLE DISASTER (GRAVITY 3D)

The perfect maelstrom of immersive 3D visuals and inventive audio

BEACH ASSAULT (EDGE OF TOMORROW 3D)

The next best thing to being on the frontlines alongside the Cruiser

NIGHT VISION (ROBOCOP)

The warehouse shootout is an awesome test of your black levels

'EWW!' OF THE YEAR

Toilet Transformation (Wolfcop)



Ever since *An American Werewolf in London* amazed cinemagoers over thirty years ago, filmmakers have repeatedly tried (and failed) to top that movie's show-stopping transformation scene. Sensibly, this low-budget horror-comedy doesn't attempt to match Rick Baker's award-winning special effects. Instead, it opts to show us something equally unforgettable – the sight of the film's hero mutating into a werewolf while using a urinal, with particular attention paid to the damage done to some of his, erm, more sensitive areas. Eeek!



DISC FAIL

WINNER

FOX'S TREATMENT OF TV SHOWS ON BLU-RAY

While 20th Century Fox's prioritising of Digital HD releases over Blu-ray has caused a few eyebrows to raise, it's the decision to suddenly stop releasing a handful of its most popular TV shows on hi-def disc that's made our blood boil. Who cares if you've been collecting *Modern Family*, *Glee* or *Bones* on Blu-ray? Not Fox, that's for sure, which made the most recent season of each only available on DVD. We dread to think which series could be next for the chop...

ALSO NOMINATED

COMMUNITY: SEASON FIVE

Ditching the extras left dedicated UK fans opting to import

MUPPETS MOST WANTED

Who was the muppet who decided on a DTS-HD HR mix?

SEVEN SAMURAI

While the film's a masterpiece, the restoration was anything but



BEST FIGHT

WINNER

RAMA VS THE ASSASSIN (THE RAID 2)

The best of the many punch-ups in Gareth Evans' epic martial arts sequel is the brutal and bloody showdown between Rama (Iko Uwais) and 'The Assassin' (Cecep Arif Rahman). A master class in close-combat choreography... provided you've the stomach to watch it.

ALSO NOMINATED

RAMA VS. HAMMER GIRL (THE RAID 2)

This sleek hired killer definitely has the right tool for the job. Ouch!

CAP VS. WINTER SOLDIER (CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER)

A fight that's as punishing emotionally as it is physically

GODZILLA VS. M.U.T.O.S

It's a long-time coming, but this monster-mash is worth the wait



BEST COMEDY

WINNER

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

The great hero Kevin Bacon. Peter Quill's 'pelvic sorcery'. Having part of a plan. Drax's difficulty with metaphors. Dance-offs. Humour has always been a key element of Marvel Studio's output, but this is its first flick that aims for laughs from start to finish. And succeeds.

ALSO NOMINATED

THE WOLF OF WALL STREET

Martin Scorsese's satirical biopic is rude, crude and incredibly funny

BAD NEIGHBOURS

Mischievous enough to make *Animal House* feel fairly quaint

22 JUMP STREET

More self-aware than its predecessor and just as amusing



BEST GAME

WINNER

ALIEN: ISOLATION

From the superb art direction to its masterful use of surround sound, developer The Creative Assembly captures the horror of being hunted by H.R. Giger's nightmarish creation in this revolutionary survival horror. Dim the lights, turn up the volume and enjoy.

ALSO NOMINATED

TITANFALL

Visually stunning online-only shooter with added mechs-appeal

ULTRA STREET FIGHTER IV

The definitive version of the undisputed king of beat 'em ups

MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOWS OF MORDOR

Tolkien meets *Assassin's Creed* in this thrilling third-person adventure



ICON OF THE YEAR

WINNER

KEVIN FEIGE

Hollywood tends to be risk-averse when it comes to its blockbusters, but Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige has shown a willingness to experiment with both *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*. Roll on *Avengers 2* et al!

ALSO NOMINATED

KICKSTARTER

Crowdfunding gives us the Blu-ray and DVD releases we really want

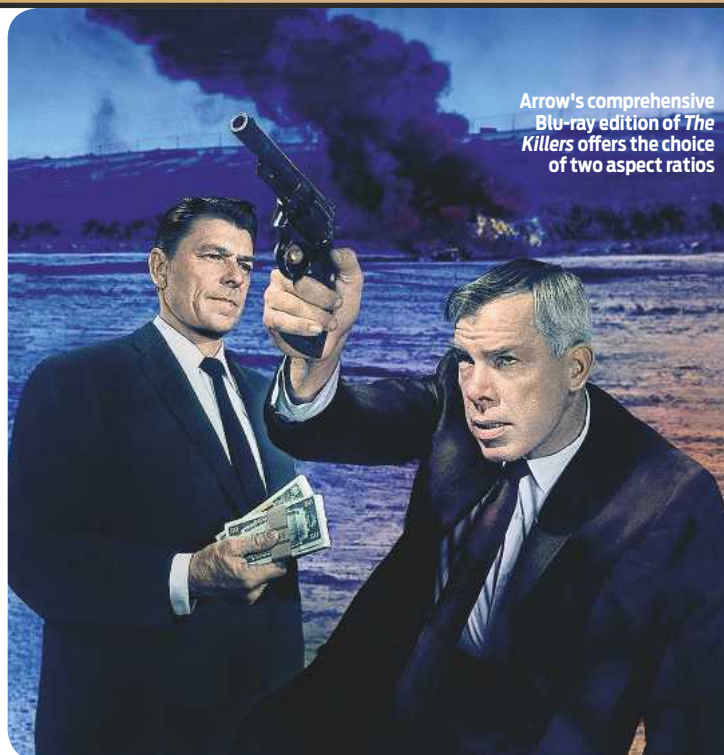
DAVID LYNCH

Cult filmmaker clearly knows what makes a damn fine Blu-ray boxset

CHRIS PRATT

The undisputed king of 2014's blockbusters. Next up? *Jurassic World*!

The Arrow Academy and Arrow Video labels cater for Blu-ray obsessives



Arrow's comprehensive Blu-ray edition of *The Killers* offers the choice of two aspect ratios



Joe Dante's *The 'Burbs* was one of the crown jewels in Arrow's 2014 lineup



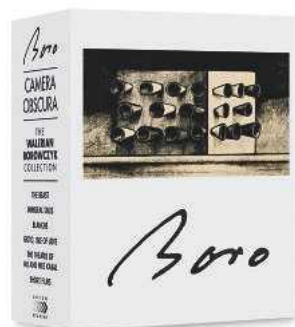
LABEL OF THE YEAR

WINNER

ARROW FILMS

The UK indie continues to outdo major studios and thrill film fans with comprehensive, collectible BD packages released through the Arrow

Video and Arrow Academy imprints, with AV quality bolstered by the addition of James White as Head of Restoration and Technical Services. And in 2014 it's involved fans directly, using crowd-funding to support a huge restoration project and an expansion into the US. This is a movie label at the top its game. Long may it continue.



ALSO NOMINATED

EUREKA: THE MASTERS OF CINEMA SERIES

Nobody does more when it comes to giving Blu-ray exposure to early cinema

PARAMOUNT

Dolby Atmos found its first supporter with this forward-thinking Hollywood major

88 FILMS

A mix of excellent extras and a new 'Slasher Collection' lineup adds to this label's glowing status with genre fans



Sandra Bullock takes Blu-ray to infinity and beyond in *Gravity* 3D



DISC OF THE YEAR

WINNER

GRAVITY 3D

The first time we spun up the Warner Bros. Blu-ray of Alfonso Cuarón's sci-fi smash it was clear that we were getting something pretty special. The movie is both an engrossing thriller and an astonishing technical achievement in terms of visual effects, but it's also a remarkable home cinema experience – one that revitalised our interest in 3D Blu-ray and wowed us with its inventive and scene-setting audio. Add in one of the most informative *Making of...* documentaries we've seen in years and you have a hi-def platter that gets everything right. That Atmos-flavoured re-release can't come soon enough!

ALSO NOMINATED

CAMERA OBSCURA: THE WALERIAN BOROWCZYK COLLECTION

This no-stone-unturned undertaking shows what the BD format is capable of

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

Marvel Studio's space opera is an absolute blast in hi-def

TRANSFORMERS: AGE OF EXTINCTION

This sequel sets a new standard for home cinema sonics with its Dolby Atmos soundtrack

A slice of cinema luxury

This award-winning 18-seat cinema room is only one part of a premium smarthome fit-out. Multiscreen and multiroom AV? Check. Intelligent lighting? Check. Ten-pin bowling? Er, go on then...

KIT CHECKLIST

DIGITAL PROJECTION: Titan 1080p three-chip LED projector (20,000 Lumens)

IMAGE: ArtMasque motorised four-way masking projector screen

PRO AUDIO TECHNOLOGY: 8 x SCRS-25iw in-ceiling speakers; 3 x SCRS-15sm; 4 x LFC subwoofers (15in & 18in); PMA power amplifiers

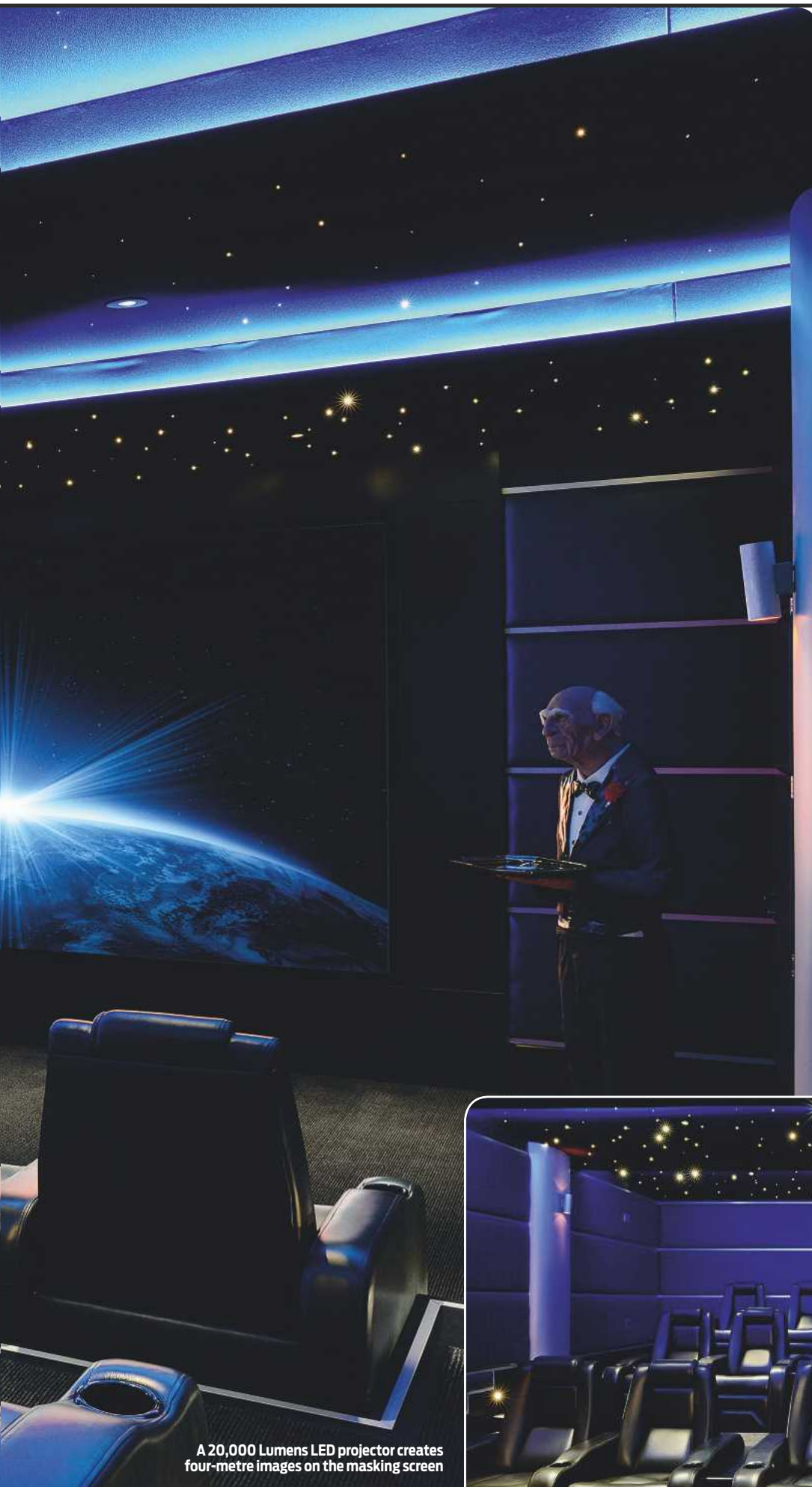
DATASAT: RS20i AV processor

DENON: DBP-2012 Blu-ray player

SKY: Sky+HD satellite receiver/PVR

KALEIDESCAPE: Movie server/player

CRESTRON: TSW-750 touchscreen controller



A 20,000 Lumens LED projector creates four-metre images on the masking screen

ONE INSTALLATION FROM this year's CEDIA Awards that melted our minds was the astonishing 18-seat cinema room that scooped the top prize in the Best Home Cinema over £100,000 category. Designed and built by Buckinghamshire outfit Smartcomm, it shows exactly what can be achieved when purse strings are well and truly loosened. And when speaking to Smartcomm more recently, they revealed the room is actually one part of a whole-house makeover of equally high-end aspirations, which took 18 months to complete. Dotted around the four floors of this family home are a ten-pin bowling alley, games room, swimming pool and library, while an all-encompassing Crestron system gives the owners total control over AV, lighting, security, blinds and climate via touchpanel interfaces.

As smarthomes go, this is Ivy League. In all, there are 18 integrated Crestron TSW-750 controllers, plus an extra dozen portable MTX-3s, and 270 Lutron lighting circuits. Neat touches include motion sensors and time controllers to activate and deactivate lighting, and an audio and video entry-gate system that can be viewed on the touchpanels, TVs and cinema screen.

Technological titan

It's the AV side that we're most interested in, of course, and this lavish install doesn't disappoint. Even without the basement cinema, the family can watch TV or movies in multiple rooms. There's a mixture of 42in and 65in flatscreens employed, with sources including Sky+HD, Apple TV and a Kaleidescape server. 'This solution allows you to watch what you want, when you want and wherever you want,' says Smartcomm's MD Steven Worrell. 'Whether you started watching your favourite programme in one room, this system would allow you to continue watching the same programme from the same place anywhere else in the house – even in the bath, with the flush-fit Aquavision TVs.' And on the ➤





audio side, over 100 Bowers & Wilkins speakers and subwoofers are integrated throughout the property.

The cinema room is undoubtedly the main attraction, however. Designed to be used by the whole family and guests, the installer was tasked with ensuring optimum AV quality across three seating rows, so a tiered layout was used. All seats are electric, leather recliners, gently illuminated by a star ceiling and additional LED lighting.

The business end features a massive four-metre Image ArtMasque screen, with flexible motorized masking to suit various aspect ratios. Tasked with crafting bright images on this mega-scale is a projector from custom install specialist Digital Projection – its Full HD resolution Titan 3D LED model claims an output of 20,000 Lumens.

Surround sound audio is delivered via a bevy of Pro Audio Technology speakers and power amplifiers. Eight of the former are fitted in-ceiling, and the quartet of subwoofers are hidden in the floor and behind the screen. 'The unimposing style of the Pro Audio selection means they slot into the walls with minimum fuss, whilst sustaining the sophistication of the décor,' says Smartcomm.

The family that gets to chill out in this cinema room, and the rest of the house, are naturally thrilled with the finished install. 'The design Smartcomm put to us was instantly liked and a system that covered all that we had asked for and more. They worked closely with our architect and delivered a system that has exceeded our expectations!'

Right, who's up for a few frames before movie night? ■



INSTALL INFO

A LET THERE BE LIGHT

The property features a 270-circuit Lutron lighting system, with motion and time control in specific zones

B AUDIO EVERYWHERE

More than 100 Bowers and Wilkins speakers and subwoofers are fitted discreetly across the four-storey house, on-hand for multiroom audio

C SCREENING CHOICES

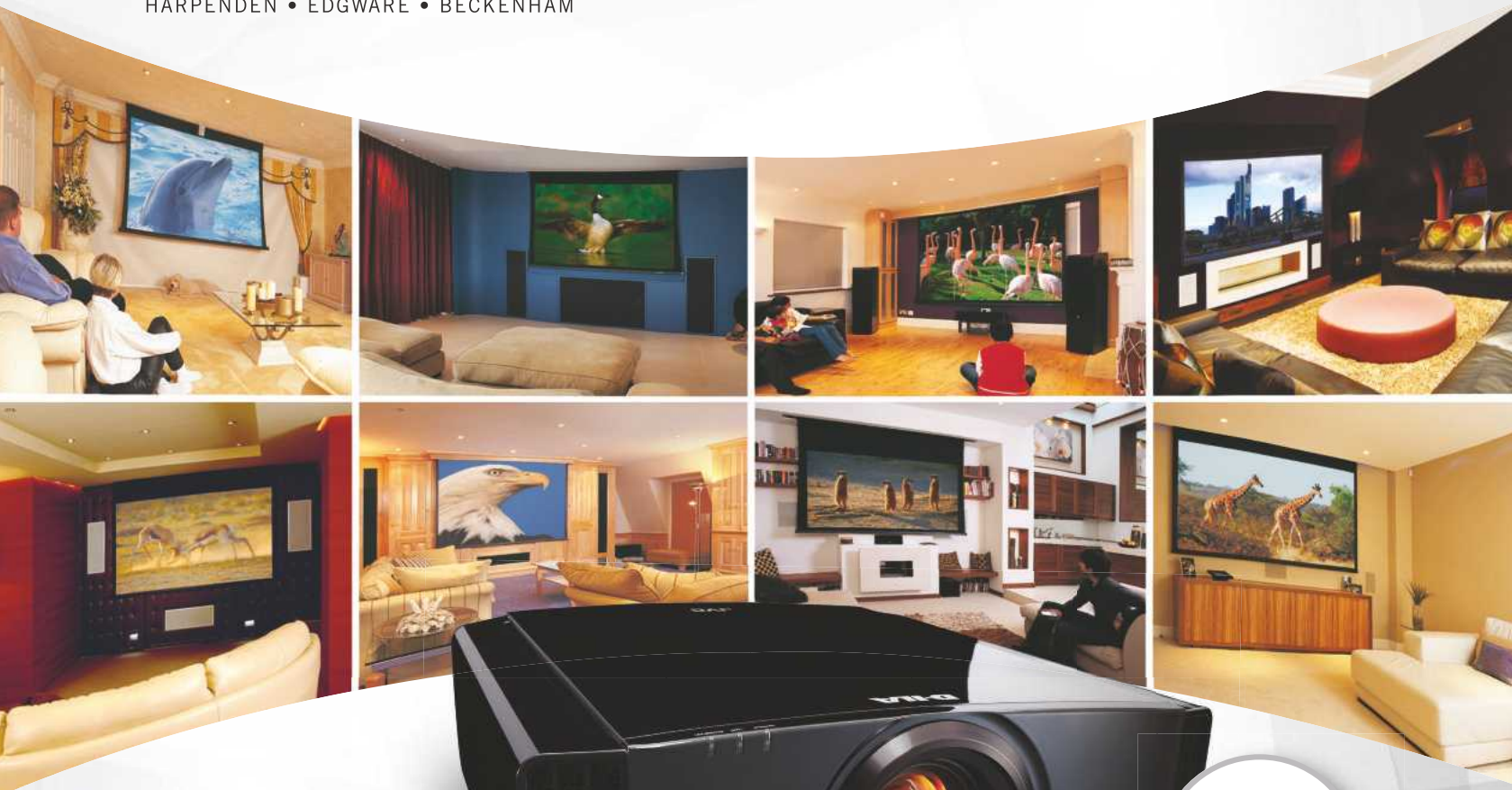
The home's 42in and 65in flatscreen TVs are linked to Sky, Kaleidescape and Apple TV sources, as are Aquavision waterproof TVs in the bathrooms

D GAME ON

This luxury smarthome even includes a two-lane ten-pin bowling alley!



HARPENDEN • EDGWARE • BECKENHAM



JVC

JVC DLA-X500
3D Projector

GET THE COMPLETE PICTURE

At Musical Images we have a choice of all the finest home cinema equipment on permanent demonstration, including the stunning JVC X500 projector. With 3 showrooms, 7 demonstration rooms, expertise, experience, patience and professionalism, for the very best in entertainment there's no better destination than Musical Images.

Musical Images Showrooms

82 High Street, Harpenden, Hertfordshire AL5 2SP
01582 764246 harpenden@musicalimages.co.uk

**NEW
SHOWROOM**

173 Station Road, Edgware, Middlesex HA8 7JX
020 8952 5535 edgware@musicalimages.co.uk

126 High Street, Beckenham, Kent BR3 1EB
020 8663 3777 beckenham@musicalimages.co.uk

Opening times - 9.30am to 5.30pm

**HIFI • HOME CINEMA • MULTIROOM AUDIO • HOME AUTOMATION
LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEMS • A/V DESIGN & CONSULTANCY**

Audio Visual Lifestyle Ltd trading as Musical Images. Finance options available, subject to status. E&OE

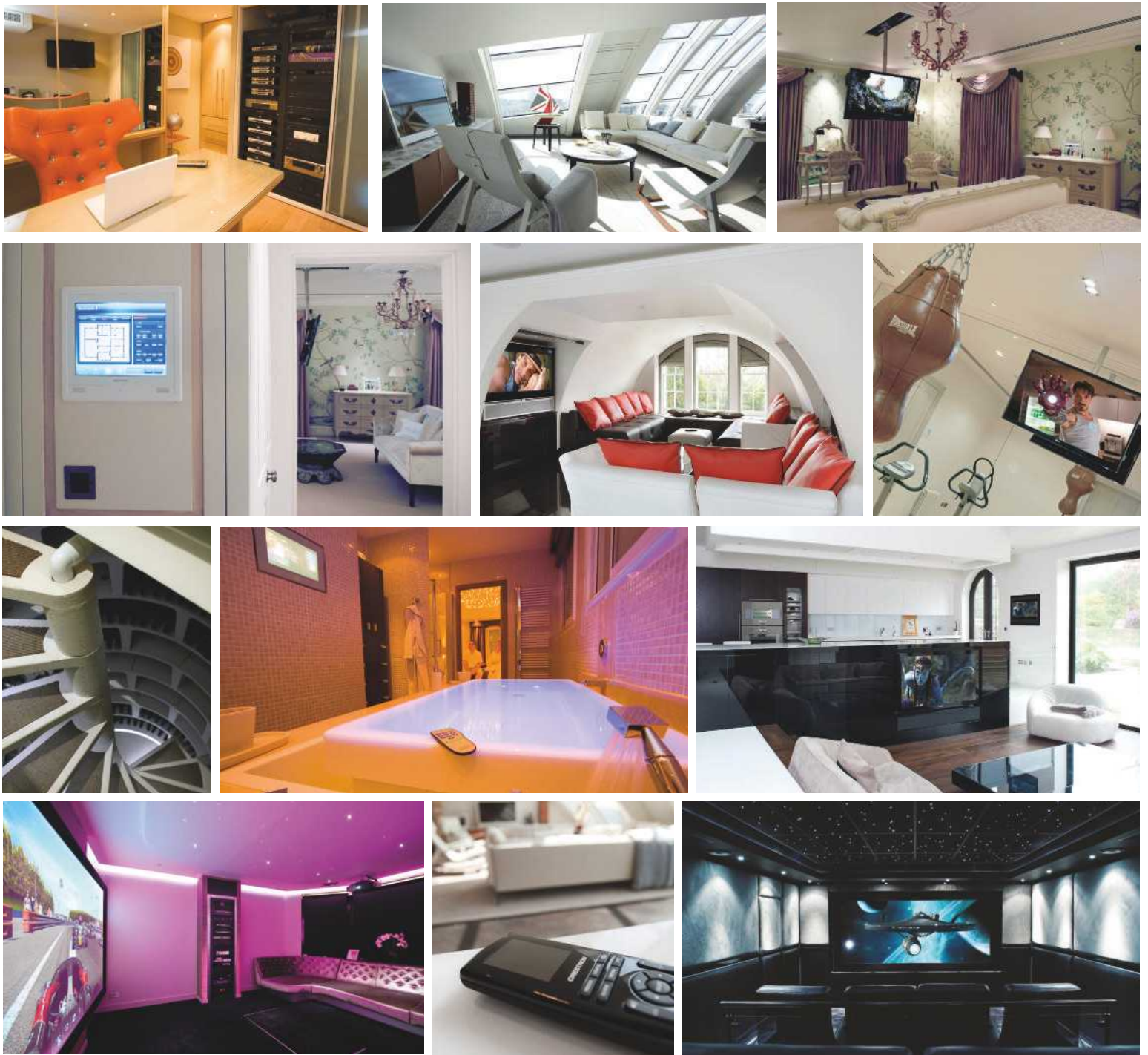
3 times award winner
HOME CINEMA CHOICE
"Best Multiroom Installation"



www.musical-images.co.uk

musical images

@musical_images



All good technologies answer a problem, they give a solution that both delights and inspires everyday living. That's why we design technology installations for homes and offices that quite simply make them better places to be.

Our specialist knowledge, extensive experience and collaboration with leading architects, interior designers and contractors mean we have produced some of the most beautiful and sophisticated installations in the world.

You can probably tell we are passionate about bringing innovation to you – contact us now to discuss how we can make your audio visual aspirations a reality.

smartcomm
integrating technology with vision

3 Barnes Wallis Court,
Cressex Business Park
High Wycombe
HP12 3PS

Telephone: 01494 471912

email: info@smartcomm.co.uk

web: www.smartcomm.co.uk



REVIEWS

→ **THE BEST OF 2014** AV RECEIVERS, AMPS & PROCESSORS Denon, Yamaha, Onkyo, Datasat, Pioneer, Marantz and Primare **LOUDSPEAKERS** B&W, DALI, JBL, Monitor Audio and Artcoustic **PROJECTORS** JVC, Epson, Sony and BenQ **TVs** Panasonic, Samsung, LG and Sony **SOUNDBARS** Canton, Q Acoustics and Yamaha **PLUS** All-in-one systems, BD decks, subwoofers, accessories and more!

Mega system!

Kreisel Sound's Quattro array delivers the goods, see p60



HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices shown on reviews are suggested RRP and may have changed



Wideboy Bravia

The 65in X9005B 4K TV sees Sony aiming for the very top of the flatscreen pile.

Steve May believes it's succeeded

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
4K Smart TV with
Active 3D and
'Wedge' design

POSITION:
Positioned above
Sony's X85
4K range

PEERS:
Samsung
UE65HU8500;
LG 65UB980V

WHATEVER ANGLE YOU take, Sony's KD-65X9005B is a formidable 4K proposition. With its mould-breaking design, pixel-pushing picture processing and audiophile pretensions, it sees Sony's TV division at its most confident.

Also available in 55in and 79in guises, this is a screen to saviour. The triangular 'Wedge' form factor may take some initial getting used to (particularly if you have a hankering for a truly slim screen) but I quickly grew to love it. Overall build quality is superb, with the chromed end panels and rolled top evoking a premium feel. You'll need some room to park it, though. The forward-facing speaker array extends the width of the set to 149cm. Measure up before you buy!

A low centre of balance means that the TV's two chromed feet and bag of screws are all that's needed to keep it upright. If their edge-placement is too wide for your AV furniture, you can bolt the boots more centrally in an optional second position. To be honest, though, this doesn't look quite so well balanced.

Alternatively you can wall-mount the panel. Provided in the box are custom spacers which compensate for the angled shape when using a standard VESA mount. Also bundled is a port replicator. This PTR-BR100 box has its own power supply and single satellite and RF connections, plus inputs for a solitary USB and three HDMI's. A tethered chord breaks out into the required back-panel inputs. While this may help simplify cable management when wall-mounting, it's worth noting that the port replicator doesn't support MHL.

If you prefer to lace your kit conventionally you can take advantage of four HDMI inputs, plus three USBs, Ethernet, Scart, component/composite video and stereo audio inputs. There's also a TV aerial jack, twin satellite LNB input for dual tuners, CI card slot and a digital audio optical output.

The screen comes with both a standard remote and a touchpad Bluetooth controller. The latter is ostensibly more intuitive to use, however it's extremely sensitive and requires a good deal of patience.

No more being Passive

Of course, there's more than just a design change to differentiate this year's X9 from the 2013 model. A new panel supplier means a return to Active Shutter 3D, compared to the Passive flavour of last year. Two pairs of shuttering 3D glasses are supplied.

Personally I prefer Passive 3D, particularly on a 4K screen able to upscale away any detail deficit. However, it has to be said the 3D here works extremely well, provided you view in a light-controlled room where flicker isn't going to be an issue. Crosstalk is negligible, and oddly the set appears to produce better results from side-by-side 3D broadcasts (eg. Sky) than it does from sequential 3D Blu-ray. Guillermo del Toro's *Pacific Rim* (via Sky 3D) proved a real knockout. The dimensional images offered astounding stereo separation while the convoluted image processing delivered a picture that looked much like *faux* 4K.

Picture quality is outstanding with both Full HD and 4K. The KD-65X9005B delivers deep blacks with Himalayan peaks, courtesy of Sony's new X-tended Dynamic Range image processing; there are no greyed-out night scenes or compromised shadow details to worry about. The screen also has a quite extraordinary colour palette, particularly when it comes to saturated reds and greens, which are deep and rich.

A single dedicated chip, the XCA8-4K, handles the Sony's 2160p upscaling, after the signal has been colour managed. And it's a superior slice of silicon, with the level of detail and texture in an image consistently mind-blowing.

Triluminos image processing is compatible with the extended x.v.color information included in Sony's Mastered in 4K Blu-ray line, although this only works on the Cinema preset. Non-linear expansion allows the set to deliver a near full DCI spectrum without compromising skin tones, says the brand.

'60Hz football footage shows just how transformational 4K will be when it comes to sports coverage'

Unlike last year's debut X9 4K model, there's an HEVC decoder onboard here, making the set compliant with Netflix 4K. *House of Cards: Season 2* proves to be a feast of fine detail, while the service's assorted *Moving Art* travelogues are similarly impressive. Of course, the downside of long exposure to such hi-res material is that SD channels become all but unwatchable.

Motion handling is somewhat different from, and not quite as good as, last year's X9

series, although you'll be hard pressed to tell during normal viewing. Results are entirely dependent on Motionflow setting. The most appealing options are Standard, Clear and True Cinema, all of which avoid overt motion artefacting; they do, however, deliver variable levels of motion resolution. The Cinema setting inevitably has the most filmic presentation but is relatively low on detail. Crisper images are delivered by Standard. Smooth offers up pronounced artefacting and should be avoided altogether, while Impulse is far too flickery to be watchable.

To really see the set in all its glory, I hooked up a 4K media player (the Sony POP-FMPA60) preloaded with 3,840 x 2,160 resolution sequences, some of which were in high frame-rate 60Hz. Live concert footage of Muse was packed with intricacies, emphasising crowd reactions and revealing raw emotion on Matthew Bellamy's face as he hollers 'Follow me!' Meanwhile, an almost impossibly dynamic sequence featuring a red-dressed jazz crooner locked in inky darkness is compelling proof of the set's black-level chops, while footage shot at the FIFA Confederations Cup, in 60Hz, shows just how transformational 4K will be when it comes to sports coverage. Player detail is hyper real.

The KD-65X9005B's 'Wedge' design has afforded Sony's designers considerable scope when it comes to crafting an audio system appropriate for this screen. The wider base accommodates bigger bass drivers than before, with the result that the TV is positively forceful in its audio performance. It's compatible with the brand's £250 Bravia SWF wireless sub, which offers even more LF, but I doubt many will feel a need to add it.

And the improved audio isn't just down to space. Compared to its 2013 4K sets, Sony has upgraded everything from circuitry and the Magnetic Fluid speaker units to the driving DSP. The set claims a 65W power output from an upgraded amplifier, with 12.5W going to the main stereo pair and 2 x 20W going to rear ported subs. This is the same as last year, but there's a beefier power supply and the drivers are now Mica-coated glass fibre designs.

As good as it gets

When it comes to sound and vision, Sony's KD-65X9005B is pretty much as good as it gets. A cocktail of vibrant hues, effortless dynamics and scintillating resolution make this a 2160p display to savour. With 4K content it's mesmeric, and thankfully Full HD upscaling with X-Reality PRO is often astonishingly effective. Even the Active 3D performance is thoroughly entertaining.

Add to that a rich variety of Smart functionality, HEVC and HDMI 2.0 future-proofing and best-in-class audio, and you've arguably the most compelling reason yet to jump onboard the 4K UHD bandwagon ■

ON THE MENU



→ Sony's UI is perhaps not the most visually interesting (and its Smart portal misses out on some key VOD apps), but it provides an easy gateway to making picture adjustments. Settings can be tailored to individual inputs

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active Shutter 3D

4K: Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 resolution

TUNER: Yes. 1 x Freeview HD; 2 x satellite

CONNECTIONS: 4 x HDMI; Scart; component/composite video; 3 x USB; Ethernet; optical digital audio output; CI slot

SOUND: 65W

BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): N/A

CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED): 'More than one million'

DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND): 1,494(w) x 790(h) x 95(d)mm

WEIGHT (OFF STAND): 45.9kg

FEATURES: Motionflow XR800; media server playback from USB and network; integrated Wi-Fi; X-Reality PRO processing engine; X-tended Dynamic Range; Triluminos colour; Clearaudio +; One-Flick Discovery UI and Sony Entertainment Network; Football mode; Magnetic Fluid speakers; optional wireless subwoofer; adjustable feet

HCC VERDICT



Sony KD-65X9005B

→ £3,600 Approx → www.sony.co.uk

→ Tel: 0845 6000 124

HIGHS: Superb image definition; deep blacks and great dynamic range; excellent audio performance; dramatic design; One-flick Discovery bar UI

LOWS: Active Shutter 3D at its best only in a dark room; not a full complement of catch-up

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Ahead of the curve

John Archer discovers that a high-end 4K TV can still set his pulse racing even if it's no longer technically a flatscreen



'OOH, I REALLY want a curved TV!' said nobody ever, but Samsung is convinced the future of TV isn't flat. In fact, so sure is the Korean screen king that bent is best that it only offers its top-tier 4K TV technology in a curved model: the 65in UE65HU8500. Is this a case of knowing what's good for us before we do, or just trying to be different for the sake of it? Well, there's no denying that it makes for a striking-looking TV.

Samsung ships the UE65HU8500 with an external connections box, here equipped with 4K-friendly HDMI 2.0 ports. Actually, the connection box is much more than just that – it also contains the new Quad Core Plus processing engine that drives Samsung's flagship

beast. The shift to a 1.8GHz 'Plus' Quad Core system versus last year's 1.2GHz iteration boosts picture processing speeds and ensures Samsung's ever-more complex Smart TV service works slickly.

Squirting my UHD test footage compilation into the UE65HU8500, two things become immediately clear. First, its picture quality is absolutely stellar. And second, the curve isn't the horror show I'd feared it might be. In fact, maybe it actually does improve picture quality in some ways...

Contrast is exceptional. After some basic work to rein in the excessive contrast and backlight settings Samsung always seems

to favour with its presets, the dark cityscape that Colin Farrell looks out over from his balcony in *Total Recall* is presented with a gorgeous combination of inky black depths and bright vehicle lights, with a dynamic range that I wasn't expecting from an edge LED lighting array. There's practically no backlight clouding either, putting to bed a fear I'd had about curved screen edge LED technology.

My *After Earth* and *Total Recall* 4K film clips – plus some footage of the Rio carnival – also show mesmerising detail and sharpness. This screen presents every minute detail in the image with utmost precision, and its advanced colour handling, courtesy of a new tech dubbed PurColour that shortens the colour processing 'path', works brilliantly well, delivering levels of colour subtlety suited to 4K's extra resolution. In fact, the impact Samsung's improved colour handling has on the image is a handy reminder that you need more than mere pixels to deliver the maximum 4K effect.

And what about that curve? Well, it can certainly help you feel more immersed, as the

extremities of the image curl gently into your peripheral vision, and contrast and colour suffered much less drop off when viewing the screen off-axis than on many Samsung flat TVs. It's not an unmitigated success, though, causing stretched and/or doubled reflections of any bright objects opposite the screen, and uncomfortable image geometry if you sit too far off-axis.

With brilliantly handled upscaling of even the most noisy and detailed BD material, a thrilling Active 3D performance (once the presets have been tamed) and solid audio, Samsung has undoubtedly achieved greatness with its range-topper. Rest assured, there's more to it than its styling ■

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active
4K: Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 resolution
TUNER: Yes. Freesat HD and Freeview HD
CONNECTIONS: 4 x HDMI; Ethernet; component video input; 2 x composite video inputs; 3 x USB
SOUND: 60W
BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): N/A
CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED): N/A
DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND): 1,451(w) x 848(h) x 111(d)mm
WEIGHT (OFF STAND): 26.8kg
FEATURES: Curved screen; extensive Smart features including Netflix, LoveFilm/Amazon Prime and the four key UK catchup TV services; built-in Wi-Fi; colour and gamma management; Depth Enhancement processing; 1,200Hz motion processing; multimedia playback via DLNA or USB

HCC VERDICT

Samsung UE65HU8500

→ £3,500 Approx → www.samsung.co.uk
 → Tel: 0330 726 7864

HIGHS: Stunning picture quality with all sources; feature- and content-rich Smart system; upgradable connections and processing; good audio performance

LOWS: The curve can cause reflection issues; picture presets overcooked (especially 3D)

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
65in 4K TV with a curved screen

POSITION:
Part of Samsung's flagship TV range for 2014

PEERS:
Sony KD-65X9005B;
Panasonic
TX-L65WT600;
LG 65UB980V

OLED is ready for battle

Largescreen OLED arrives with a curved form factor and a reduced price tag. **John Archer** is immediately impressed – even if LG's 55in set is only Full HD



AS FAR BACK as 2008, the AV world was getting excited by the jaw-dropping pictures delivered by OLED technology at various shows around the world. Yet it took until 2014 for a model to arrive on our test bench.

What's so great about OLED? To recap, the USP is that each OLED pixel generates its own luminance independently, rather than external lighting being applied to the whole screen or screen segments. This has profound implications for contrast, as it means OLED can potentially deliver full white pixels right alongside full black ones. It should also prove handy with image clarity and colour subtlety, and help remove the motion blur issue associated with poor LCD response times.

LG's 55EA980W also hammers home OLED's incredible potential for slimness. The outer third or so of its rear is only a few millimetres deep, delivering a mind-boggling style statement. And the curved screen sits atop an attractive transparent base containing a pair of – ooh, fancy – see-thru speakers.

Full HD flagbearer

The 55EA980W employs a Passive 3D system; it doesn't,

however, offer 4K/UHD resolution. There are healthy calibration options, providing full management over colour, gamma and white balance, as well as control over all aspects of the set's video processing. Yet the picture quality is so spectacular that I found myself fussing way less over image settings than usual. Contrast is particularly stellar, showing OLED cruising past plasma (RIP) in this critical area at the first time of asking. I dug out the suitably dark vampire flick *30 Days of Night* and could barely believe how perfectly LG's TV rendered the relentless night-sky backdrop. There's no grey mist over even the most pitch-black corner, and no sign of any light 'block' artefacts nor backlight clouding. And images retain fantastic punch and dynamism even when they contain bright and dark material simultaneously.

Colour reproduction is stunning, combining potent saturations with exceptionally subtle blends for a non-4K panel.

The only thing apart from its Full HD resolution that feels not quite 'next-gen' about the 55EA980W is its 3D playback. While stereoscopic material undoubtedly looks very tidy, with no crosstalk, good colour and an enhanced sense of depth, the way Passive technology reduces the sharpness and detail of Full HD 3D Blu-rays seems rather at odds with the OLED precision elsewhere.

Stick to 2D, though, and this is a killer TV ■

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Passive

4K: No. 1,920 x 1,080

TUNER: Freeview HD and satellite HD

CONNECTIONS: 4 x HDMI; 3 x USB; Ethernet; Scart; composite video input; optical digital audio output; stereo audio input; component video input; PC input

SOUND: 40W (10W x 4)

BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): N/A

CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED): Infinite!

DIMENSIONS: 1,227(w) x 798.5(h) x 192(d)mm

WEIGHT: 17.2kg

FEATURES: OLED panel technology; curved form factor; Smart TV with Magic Remote control; colour management; white balance management; gamma management; TruMotion motion processing; Triple XD Engine; Dual Play 3D; seven picture presets; USB recording; DLNA media playback; Miracast; NFC; built-in Wi-Fi

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
55in curved OLED TV with Passive 3D

POSITION:
Now joined by the WebOS 55EC930V

PEERS:
Sony KD-55X9005B (LED, 4K);
Samsung UE55HU8500 (LED, 4K)

HCC VERDICT

LG 55EA980W

→ £3,500 Approx → www.lg.com/uk
→ Tel: 0844 847 5454

HIGHS: Unprecedented HD picture quality; stunning design; strong Smart TV system; startlingly good sound

LOWS: The curve isn't very family friendly; it's not 4K; obviously it's not cheap; can't be wall-mounted

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

A sign of the 4K times

This 42in Panasonic Full HD flatscreen costs less than £500. How things have changed, marvels **John Archer**



AT £430, THIS is eye-catchingly affordable for a TV that's not even from the bottom end of Panasonic's current range. Yes, it's a 'mere' 42in and only a Full HD resolution – bigger screen sizes and 4K resolutions have changed the market considerably – but it can still form the centre piece of a smallscale cinema setup.

Connections are solid. A trio of HDMI, two USBs and both Ethernet and integrated Wi-Fi options make up the most important stuff. Those network hookups enable streaming of media files from DLNA-capable devices, and access to Panasonic's online service. The highlight of the latter is the integrated Freetime system. Also found higher up Panasonic's 2014 range, this brings catch-up services for all the

main UK terrestrial broadcast channels via an EPG guide that can be scrolled back in time as well as forward. For technophobes worried about not being able to get their heads around a video-streaming hub, Freetime is a dream come true.

The TX-42AS600 doesn't support 3D

playback. It does, though, carry a 100Hz motion reproduction system which is driven – along with other processing-based aspects of picture reproduction – by a dual-core engine. By far the best bit of news about the TX-42AS600, though, is that it uses a VA-type LCD panel rather than an IPS one.

The struggles of IPS screens to deliver a good black colour have been painfully exposed this year by the black level improvements of rival VA-style panels. The appeal of the latter can be appreciated the instant you feed the TX-42AS600 any predominantly dark image. In *The Dark Knight Rises*, as Batman is mercilessly pummelled by Bane in the gloom of the villain's underground lair, the darkness of the walls around him suffers little with the misty grey look associated with low-contrast LCD TVs. There's more shadow detail in Batman's suit and the walls, too, helping the scene enjoy an expansive sense of depth.

Moving away from the contrast advantages of the TX-42AS600's VA panel, a run-through of *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* (Blu-ray) reveals it to be capable of producing impressively bold colours. It captures HD detailing from Blu-rays and good-quality HD broadcasts very well, too, with minimal noise and no sign of forced edging or fizzing noise over areas of ultra-fine detail. Obviously, I'm not talking about anything to rival 4K/UHD displays,

but if you were hoping to get 4K for this price you're living in dream land. For now, anyway...

The aforementioned strengths are enough to help the TX-42AS600 stand out from this year's budget TV crowd. Even a reduction in sharpness during action scenes (as the set loses a chunk of resolution over moving objects) and a mediocre audio performance don't irritate that much considering the price tag. Sure, it would struggle in a shoot-out with high-end screens, but Panasonic has engineered a TV that's a no-brainer for second-room use or a modest main system ■

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No
4K: No
TUNER: Freeview HD
CONNECTIONS: 3 x HDMI inputs; 2 x USB; RGB Scart; component video input; RF input; built-in Wi-Fi; Ethernet port
SOUND: 20W stereo
BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): N/A
CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED): N/A
DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND): 947(w) x 552(h) x 53(d)mm
WEIGHT (OFF STAND): 12kg
FEATURES: 100Hz Backlight Blinking; My Home Screen interface; TV Anywhere system; Freetime built in; Smart Viera app access; Panasonic TV Remote 2 app support with 'swipe and share'; My Stream content recommendation system; Dynamic/Normal/Cinema/True Cinema/Custom presets; dual-core processing engine; DLNA/USB media file playback

HCC VERDICT

Panasonic TX-42AS600

→ £430 Approx → www.panasonic.co.uk
 → Tel: 0844 844 3899

HIGHS: Good, contrast-rich picture quality; decent value; Freetime is a welcome Smart TV addition; unobtrusive design

LOWS: Some motion blur; standard-def colours look a little basic; some strong competition at this price level

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
42in Full HD TV

POSITION:
Roughly at the centre of Panasonic's HD TV range despite its affordability

PEERS:
Samsung UE40H6400;
Sony KDL-40W605

Flatscreen fancy

Samsung's 55HU7500 provides a sublime mix of features and performance, says **Martin Pipe**

SAMSUNG'S UE55HU7500 SHARES

much of the traits of its HU8500 sibling (p42), but is a good chunk more affordable – what you lose out on is the 'Plus' variant of the brand's Quad Core processing engine, the external connections box, and the curved form. Those after a 4K display with a flat aesthetic could immediately be tempted.

Even out of the box the HU7500 delivers the goods visually – especially in 'Movie' mode – and over a fairly wide viewing angle. With Blu-rays and studio-based HD broadcasts, I was treated to one of the best black levels I've ever seen, aided by stable backlight illumination, although colour saturation was a tad high. Snap and vitality were in abundance, and surprisingly little work was required to achieve a basic calibration. AV geeks will appreciate the full range of techie adjustments, among them R/G/B-only display and 10-point white balance controls.



Other presets yielded a rather weak contrast and lack of depth, thanks to the employment of an ambient-light sensor, power conservation feature and other tricks (these can be turned off, thankfully).

The 4K resolution and Samsung's processing grunt conjures up a great sense of detail with HD sources. Even SD channels and DVDs look good put through the 4K wringer,

Want big? The HU7500 is available at 75in too

with no blockiness (but not searing sharpness either). Meanwhile, a spin of Disney Pixar's *Cars 2* on Blu-ray showed off the HU7500's Active 3D potential; long-shots of the Allinol barrels ranged alongside the Tokyo pit-stops were mesmerising. And 30p and 50p 4K test material (via satellite) was breathtakingly-rendered, showcasing the leap in quality from upscaled to native 4K. Highly recommended ■

HCC VERDICT

Samsung UE55HU7500 → £2,300

Overall ★★★★★

FINLUX 50F8075-T → £600 approx

Affordable, admirable

Until its 4K sets break cover, this 50-incher is Finlux's flagship TV. **Adrian Justins** reports

FINLUX IS A name synonymous with value for money. The brand sells its low-cost wares direct to the public through the web and by phone. Where else can you score yourself a 50in edge-lit LED for just £600?

Alright, the 50F8075-T's panel is vanilla-flavoured 50Hz and there's no picture processor for eradicating blur and judder but the TV does have three HDMI's, plenty of picture and sound presets and comes with a Wi-Fi dongle. The latter provides an alternative to a wired Ethernet hookup and lets you feed your brain via Finlux's well-designed Smart TV portal. The VOD selection is something of a starter pack, but at least you get Netflix and iPlayer, plus a web browser, whilst Twitter and Facebook apps give you the chance to get hashtagging and liking. The rest of the TV's user interface is equally pleasing on the eye and easy to browse.

The 50F8075-T may lack a fast refresh rate and elaborate picture processing but its images



are still eminently watchable. There's very little jerkiness and judder to fast-moving subjects, both with drama (*Game of Thrones*) and sport (cricket and football on Sky HD) – objects such as balls and players moving across the screen retain their shape. Static shots have terrific

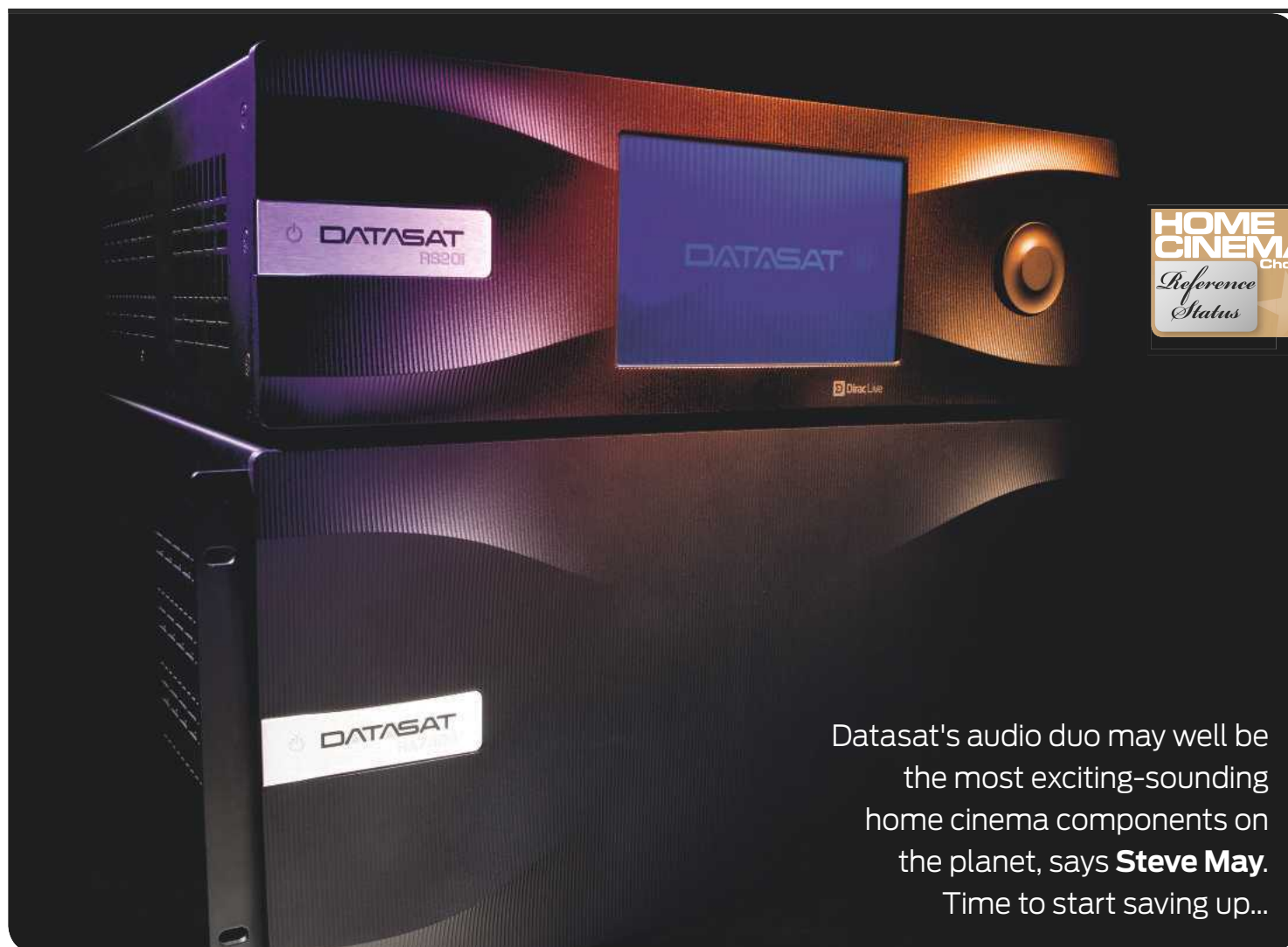
Finlux takes aim at budget buyers

clarity and detail, and a pleasing naturalness. However, motion resolution from Finlux's frill-free panel is not the best. On the other hand, colours – although certainly not as punchy as higher-end LEDs – aren't glaringly off-kilter, and the set's illumination is even and doesn't suffer from clouding at its edges. Just be prepared to tame the backlight to get the impressive contrast and shadow detailing that the 50F8075-T is capable of ■

HCC VERDICT

Finlux 50FF8075-T → £600

Overall ★★★★★



Datasat's audio duo may well be the most exciting-sounding home cinema components on the planet, says **Steve May**. Time to start saving up...

Pro-grade cinema comes home

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
High-end AV processor/power amplifier

POSITION:
Top of Datasat's commercial line

PEERS:
Trinnov Altitude 32; Storm Audio SSP 16-3D Reference

THE BRAND ON the front of this massive pre/power combo may not be the first that springs readily to mind when it comes to high-end home theatre, but Datasat has more rights than most to call dibs on the market. Having played an intrinsic role in the birth of multichannel digital movie sound, this UK-based outfit has credibility in spades.

The Datasat Digital Entertainment story dates back to 1993, when Steven Spielberg persuaded Universal Studios to include a revolutionary 5.1 audio system from fledgling cinema sound troupe Digital Theatre Systems, now better known as DTS, on his upcoming *Jurassic Park*. Rushed into theatres for the movie release, the system was to become an essential element of a generation of

blockbusters. Its rivalry with Dolby Digital went on to define the home cinema market.

DTS was eventually split into two autonomous divisions, covering the home and theatrical markets. The digital cinema business was eventually sold off to Datasat in 2008, with the DTS branding jettisoned in 2011. Today you'll invariably see the Datasat logo closing out the credits of every major movie.

So, the company clearly understands bigscreen audio. The RS20i processor featured here, along with the RA7300 seven-channel power amp, is the brand's opening (admittedly super high-end) gambit into the home cinema space. Retailing for a combined £33,000 (£18,600 for the processor and £14,400 for the amp), these are hardly impulse buys. Indeed,

they only actually make sense within a bespoke all-encompassing custom cinema installation that will cost a magnitude more.

The RS20i is essentially a domesticated version of Datasat's cinema AP20. That SHARC-infested processor brought an audiophile sensibility to the commercial theatre market for the first time, and fittingly this domesticated sibling takes that ethos to another level. It has a superior power supply and upgraded componentry, including Analog Devices DSPs and Burr-Brown PCM4104 DACs.

Putting the muscle on the RS20i's armature is the RA7300. Tipping the scales at 56kg, this power amp is an absolute beast, but wrestling it into position is worth the effort.

'In terms of raw power, dynamic attack and image placement this Datasat combi is nigh on unbeatable'

Despite its formidable size and improbable weight, the RA7300, unlike the RS20i, is not a derivation of commercial kit. It's very much conceived as a consumer product, albeit one that's ridiculously over-engineered. Designed by Morris Kessler, the founder and chief engineer at ATI, it is tethered by twin power sockets. This is because at full tilt there simply isn't enough juice available from a single 13-amp plug to drive it. The amp is rated at a humungous 300W per channel into eight ohms. Of course, you're never going to utilise all that volume, but you'll still need to connect both power outlets, as the amp distributes the power equally from each socket.

The versatility of the RS20i is superb. There's provision to have different equalisation for movies, music and games. Every input can be configured differently. Want to tri-amp your front channels, pro-cinema style? No problem.

There's no traditional IR control supplied. It's intended to be used within a broader home control system, be it Crestron, Control 4, AMX, etc. The system can also be controlled via VNC (Virtual Network Computing) remote access from a laptop or tablet.

Playback provision includes LPCM, Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio, plus DTS: Neo and Dolby Pro-Logic post-processing. Datasat is offering an upgraded version of the RS20i with an Auro-3D audio decoding card, and Dolby Atmos is lined up, too.

Dirac Live room optimisation

As adept as the RS20i is, the true magic happens when the system is tuned using Dirac Live room optimisation software. This is actually separate to the RS20i, and requires your installer to have the Dirac Live Room

Correction suite running on a laptop. The RS20i also offers comprehensive onboard parametric equalisation, but Dirac Live does such an astonishing job you'll not want to use it. Indeed, once Dirac fine-tuned the RS20i, it rocked my listening room with a precision that integrated Audyssey packages only dream of.

The software builds an accurate acoustical model of the listening room and then detects and corrects any deficiencies. This is achieved through multiple microphone measurements, four being the minimum. In a larger room, you might typically measure nine positions.

Tuned and ready to go, the RS20i/RA7300 combo delivers breathtaking dynamics, gut-wobbling LFE and truly immersive imaging. The sound mix during the opening mountain race sequence in *Fast and Furious 6* is given almost physical form by this Datasat duo. You can literally feel the gear changes of the racing cars, the exhilarating vehicular roar resonating in the pit of your stomach. Amazingly, this system comes perilously close to mimicking the sonic excitement of a live track event.

When the klaxon-sounding drones in the Tom Cruise sci-fi *Oblivion* set about blasting the Scav's underground retreat, you'll fear they're actually demolishing the house around you; the soundstage has such scale and slam it's impossible not to grin like an idiot. If you could beam a premium theatre physically into your listening room it would sound just like this.

The Datasat system doesn't just rock on a seismic level, it delivers totally intelligible dialogue without spitch or mumble, regardless of what's going on left or right. This level of naturalistic articulation is difficult to achieve. On the debit side, the processor makes a fair old fan noise when running. Thankfully all those Watts make the thrum relatively easy to mask. Ideally though, both processor and amp should be tucked away in an equipment rack, or projection room, not plonked within earshot.

Subtle atmospheric effects are also a speciality. The deep cave explorations in Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* suddenly become scarily real, immeasurably heightening the tension. Panned effects don't ping pong from speaker to speaker, but are cohesive and believable. And the deep, taut bass control constantly surprises. The overwrought theatrics of *Battleship* have never made it a demo favourite for me, yet when its frying-pan-in-the-face action is delivered by this double-act, it almost becomes a thing of wonder.

Simply unbeatable

Stupidly huge, ruinously expensive and cursed with gale-force fan noise, the RS20i and RA7300 pre/power combination might seem an odd pairing to eulogise. But make no mistake, this is genuinely reference class – in terms of raw power, dynamic attack and image placement it's nigh on unbeatable ■

ON THE MENU



→ The RS20i's touch-sensitive front panel allows access to all the main inputs and setup menus. Alternate ways of controlling the system include a VNC client on a tablet or dedicated home system control – there's no zapper

SPECIFICATIONS

RS20i

DOLBY TRUEHD: Yes. Plus Dolby Atmos via forthcoming upgrade

DTS-HD MASTER AUDIO: Yes

THX: No

MULTICHANNEL INPUT: No

MULTIROOM: No

HDMI: 5 x inputs; 1 x output

DIGITAL AUDIO INPUTS: 2 x optical; 1 x coaxial

VIDEO UPSCALING: No

COMPONENT VIDEO: No

DIMENSIONS: 142(h) x 442(w) x 447(d)mm

WEIGHT: 12.2kg

FEATURES: VNC remote access control; serial interface; Dirac Live compatible; 20 user-defined configurable input selections; third octave EQ; parametric EQ; bass and treble controls; Ethernet; Hi/Low/Bandpass active crossovers

RA7300

POWER OUTPUT (CLAIMED): 7 x 300W (eight ohms); 7 x 450W (four ohms)

CONNECTIONS: XLR balanced inputs; DB25 balanced inputs; DB25 passthrough; binding posts for seven channels; 12V trigger

DIMENSIONS: 222(h) x 431(w) x 533(d)mm

WEIGHT: 56kg

FEATURES: Dual AC inputs; fully-balanced thermal track design

HCC VERDICT

Datasat RS20i/RA7300

→ £18,600/£14,400 → www.pulsemarketing.org

→ Tel: 01279 647 039

HIGHS: Awe-inspiring articulation and spatial imaging; huge power reserves; can be optimised for any viewing room with Dirac Live calibration

LOWS: These dedicated home theatre components are a pro install; power amp is unfeasibly heavy; lacks the basic niceties found on conventional AVRs; rowdy processor fan noise

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

3D audio evangelist

This Denon AVR supports Dolby Atmos, and has an eye on rival next-gen format Auro-3D. Old-timer **Steve May** wonders how best to connect his Betamax...



WHILE THE BASIC form factor of Denon's AVR-X4100W promises comfy familiarity, everything from feature set to UI has been dramatically overhauled. This is an AVR ripped from the science labs of tomorrow, an AV hub in a Starfleet uniform. It's Dolby Atmos-capable out of the box, and soon you'll be able to buy a firmware upgrade for Auro-3D.

Despite its complexity, this whizz-bang box isn't that challenging to drive. Denon has made massive improvements to overall usability, integrating Apple AirPlay, Bluetooth and Wi-Fi and largely eradicating the quirks and niggles of old-school receivers.

The AVR-X4100W has seven rear-facing HDMI inputs, plus an additional fascia input and three outputs for screen, projector and second zone. All input sources can be scaled to 4K resolution if required. HDMI 2.0 support implies compatibility with 4K/UHD up to 60Hz; the

AVR-X4100W is also cool with 4:4:4 chroma subsampling, but not HDCP 2.2.

It's a seven-channel design, with the option of nine-channel processing via additional stereo amplification. Typically, users will choose either an

Atmos 5.1.2 speaker layout, or a traditional seven-channel surround one. Power output is rated at 7 x 125W into eight ohms.

Transforming sonics

The AVR-X4100W is nothing if not short of power. At reference level it grabs your listening room like a deranged Decepticon and shakes it until everything rattles. But this receiver is also fast and dynamic, making for a terrifically exciting

listen. The mix of *Transformers* is thunderously complex, yet the AVR-X4100W keeps track of the destruction, with pin-point image placement and excellent midrange delineation. And fed calmer fare it can sound almost lyrical. Dolby's Atmos trailers, with birdsong, insects and tropical rain, all sound eerily naturalistic.

Given the paucity of Atmos content, it's just as well that the AVR-X4100W's upmix function can be used with any multichannel source. This is more unpredictable but worth consideration; Atmos post-processing adds a sense of ambience and scale to 5.1, particularly TV material like *The Walking Dead*, where it brings the Walkers that bit closer to biting distance.

At times the AVR-X4100W can seem a little heavy-handed, particularly when it comes to fine top-py detail; tiny elements in the mix can be obscured. That said, it's exceptionally smooth, something that becomes apparent when taken out of Atmos territory and reconfigured into a seven-channel horizontal layout. The futuristic panning that characterises *Oblivion* is super-slick. Indeed, there's an authority of presence about the soundfield that hints of a genuinely high-end performance.

Overall, the AVR-X4100W is a first-rate AVR. It's brilliantly equipped, deeply immersive in Atmos guise, yet capable of unplugged grace with high-res audio sources. So for enthusiasts waiting to jump onboard the 3D audio bandwagon, it's a tempting upgrade ■

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY TRUE HD: Yes. Plus Dolby Atmos
DTS-HD MASTER AUDIO: Yes
THX: No
MULTICHANNEL INPUT: No
POWER OUTPUT (CLAIMED): 7 x 125W (eight ohms)
MULTIROOM: Yes. Zones 2 & 3
HDMI: 8 x inputs; 3 x outputs
DIGITAL AUDIO INPUTS: 2 x optical; 2 x coaxial; 1 x Denon HD Link
VIDEO UPSCALING: Yes. To 4K
COMPONENT VIDEO: 2 x inputs; 1 x output
DIMENSIONS: 434(w) x 389(d) x 167(h)mm
WEIGHT: 12.6kg
FEATURES: Integrated Bluetooth and Wi-Fi (2.4GHz); Apple OS and Android control apps; iOS wireless sharing; Audyssey MultEQ XT32 room EQ with LFC and DSX processing; audio file playback (FLAC, WAV, AIFF, ALAC, DSD, MP3, WMA); Windows 8 certified; DLNA certified; Spotify Connect; vTuner 'net radio; Ethernet; 2 x USB; Apple AirPlay; 12V trigger; AM/FM Tuner

HCC VERDICT

Denon AVR-X4100W

→ £1,300 Approx → www.denon.co.uk
 → Tel: 02890 279830

HIGHS: Vigorous, exciting multichannel performance; integrated Wi-Fi and Bluetooth; generous HDMI provision

LOWS: Can sound heavy-handed; kinks to work out of the Dolby Atmos setup; no THX post-processing on offer

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Seven-channel Atmos receiver

POSITIONING:
Above the non-Atmos X3100W, below the X5200W

PEERS:
Onkyo TX-NR838; Yamaha RX-A2040

A fuss-free flagship

Yamaha's feature-laden, power-packed RX-A3040 receiver is a technical *tour de force*. Yet **Ed Selley** loves it for simpler reasons



THE RX-A3040 IS currently Yamaha's highest-spec AV receiver and positively brims with features. Offering nine channels of grunt (with processing for eleven), twin subwoofer outputs, eight 4K-capable HDMI inputs (and two outputs), Wi-Fi, Spotify Connect, AirPlay, Dolby Atmos and hi-res audio support (to mention just a few highlights), it's an amp for the AV fan who wants all their bases covered.

Thankfully, it's supremely easy to use; everything from the layout of connections on the rear to the onscreen menus is logical and Yamaha's control app is a good option for those who always have a smart device (preferably a tablet) to hand. It's a very fast and intuitive piece of software.

Time to play

Connected firstly to a set of Mordaunt Short Mezzos and then a quintet of Neat Motive SX speakers, the Yamaha showed from the outset that it is considerably more than a vast collection of inputs held together by a heavy, black box.

With *Captain America*; *The Winter Soldier* (Blu-ray), this receiver is effortlessly and at times

awesomely capable. The claimed output of 150W per channel almost certainly dips under load but it doesn't prevent the RX-A3040 from handling Helicarriers plummeting from the sky with a rock-solid sense of scale and energy. Where the Yamaha excels is that while it can convey tremendous energy without breaking sweat, it never sounds hard or strained. The result is an epic demonstration of cinematic immersion, bouncing along atop a torrent of fluid power.

In many ways, though, it is when you stop asking it to do explosions and showcase a bit of subtlety that this amp truly shines. The RX-A3040 can take almost any soundtrack you like, however subdued, and find the nuances and details required to make it sound completely believable. The pared-back sonics of *Drive* (BD) are turned into a spellbindingly enthralling sphere of sound. At no stage does the Yamaha's presentation become overblown or exaggerated, and even at late-night listening levels the performance remains convincing.

Turn everything off and use the Yamaha like a 21st-century music centre, with high-res FLAC streamed directly to it and running in Pure Direct Mode, and its performance is genuinely delightful. Sure, like most AV receivers, the Yamaha can come across a bit big and obvious, but while I started to listen to the RX-A3040 out of reviewer's obligation, I continued to listen to it because it sounds enjoyable, and because the control app makes doing so a breeze. Superb ■

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY TRUEHD: Yes. Plus Dolby Atmos

DTS-HD MASTER AUDIO: Yes

THX: No

MULTICHANNEL INPUT: Yes. 7.1-channel

POWER OUTPUT (CLAIMED):

9 x 150W (eight ohms)

MULTIROOM: Yes. 3 zones

HDMI: 8 x inputs; 2 x outputs

DIGITAL AUDIO INPUTS: 3 x optical; 3 x coaxial

VIDEO UPSCALING: Yes. To 4K

COMPONENT VIDEO: 3 x inputs; 1 x output

DIMENSIONS: 435(w) x 192(h) x 467(d)mm

WEIGHT: 19.6kg

FEATURES: YPAO multi-point automatic calibration; integrated Wi-Fi; optional Bluetooth; compatible with Yamaha's AV Controller app (iOS/Android); AirPlay, Spotify Connect, Napster, Rhapsody and internet radio; 23 DSP modes; dialogue lift function; Pure Direct mode; Compressed Music Enhancer; High-Resolution Music Enhancer; ESS SABRE32 Ultra DAC for seven main channels; 4K passthrough to 60p; 11.2-channel pre-outs; MHL support; USB input; Avenge/Total Purity construction

HCC VERDICT

Yamaha RX-A3040

→ £2,000 Approx → uk.yamaha.com

→ Tel: 0844 811 1116

HIGHS: Wonderfully powerful and immersive sound; solid build quality; excellent feature set and control app; 11.2-channel processing

LOWS: No asynchronous USB or backlit remote; some minor function gripes; Bluetooth still an optional extra

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 9.2-channel Atmos-ready AVR

POSITION: Flagship AV receiver and part of the Avenge line

PEERS: Onkyo TX-NR3030, Denon AVR-X5200W, Pioneer SC-LX88

Revamped, ready to rock

Mark Craven plays with the VSX-924 – the star of Pioneer's affordable AV receiver line – and comes away pretty pleased



SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY TRUEHD: Yes
DTS-HD MASTER AUDIO: Yes
THX: No
MULTICHANNEL INPUT: No
POWER OUTPUT (CLAIMED): 7 x 150W (six ohms)
MULTIROOM: Yes. Zone 2 AV
HDMI: 7 x inputs; 2 x outputs
DIGITAL AUDIO INPUTS: 1 x optical; 1 x coaxial
VIDEO UPSCALING: Yes. To 4K
COMPONENT VIDEO: 1 x input
DIMENSIONS: 435(w) x 362(d) x 168(h)mm
WEIGHT: 9.8kg
FEATURES: Direct Energy Amplifier; MCACC Room EQ with subwoofer EQ; music streaming via network/USB includes WAV (96kHz/24-bit, 5.1), FLAC (96kHz/24-bit, 5.1), AIFF (96kHz/24-bit), MP3, ALAC, DSD; Spotify Connect; Apple AirPlay; Bluetooth; Wi-Fi (via free adaptor); 2 x USB; Ethernet; 2 x subwoofer preouts; 9 x speaker terminals; vTuner net radio; AM/FM radio; AV Navigator software; control via iControlAV5 app; Auto Sound Retriever; Auto Level Control; Phase Control; Virtual Speakers

ANYONE ENJOYING A game of 'spot the difference between two AV receivers' would face a stiff task if faced with Pioneer's new VSX-924 and its predecessor, the VSX-923. This £500 home cinema power-pusher sports the same neat styling and shares many of the same specifications. But dig a little deeper and you'll find some key upgrades that see Pioneer embracing new trends in AV, including HDMI 2.0 connectivity, built-in aptX Bluetooth support and Wi-Fi via a bundled adaptor – it's not integrated into the chassis for 'performance reasons', I'm told.

Beneath the hood there have been tweaks, too. The AKM DAC has been replaced by an ESS Sabre Premier ES9006S, the same you'll find in some £1,500 receivers. Tuning has been completed by Pioneer's LX team, who normally don't dirty themselves at this price point. On the software side, Spotify Connect is

present from launch and file compatibility now extends to multichannel 24-bit/96kHz FLAC and WAV, plus DSD over a network as well as USB.

Multichannel film soundtracks benefit from a sound that is clear, focused and adept at eking out detail. With *Gravity* on

Blu-ray, the Pioneer approaches its DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix with cool, calculated poise. Audio pans are guided with stellar precision, so that when Sandra Bullock's unfortunate astronaut is sent spinning into space in the opening act, the mixture of Foley effects, panicked screams and electro score slip 'n' slide around the soundfield. The result is delightfully cinematic. All of this occurs with the MCACC Room EQ system in use, which made good strides in my room, improving the overall balance and cohesion of the front soundstage in particular.

For the final shootout of gangster drama *Lawless* (BD), the VSX-924 brings dynamic attack to the gunshots and ricochets. Foley effects are crisply delivered and low-frequency impacts impress.

Don't mistake the VSX-924's deft handling for a conservative nature, though: it offers impressive punch from its claimed 7 x 150W (into six ohm) power plant and relishes up-tempo music material. Clubland hit *#Selfie*, streamed via Bluetooth (MP3), pumps out of my array with foot-tapping vigour. FLAC, WAV, M4A and MP3 files all happily played out from my network and USB. As did DSD 64 material, but not DSD 128 files. Britten's *Simple Symphony Op 4* (DSD 64), showed the Pioneer comfortable with the change of pace and increase in fidelity, conveying the layered nature of the piece and good instrument separation.

In all, the VSX-924 offers useful upgrades and caters well for the home cinema separates newbie. Worth a look ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 7.2-channel networked AV receiver

POSITION: Occupying the key £500 price point

PEERS: Yamaha RX-V577; Sony STR-DN1050; Onkyo TX-NR636

HCC VERDICT

Pioneer VSX-924

→ £500 Approx → www.pioneer.eu
 → Tel: 0330 123 1240

HIGHS: Bluetooth and Wi-Fi provision; fabulous app controller; tight, controlled multichannel delivery; HDMI 2.0 connectivity

LOWS: Somewhat complex to operate; offers features you'll probably never use; HDMI MHL input on rear panel; bland user interface

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Space-saving sonics

For this latest generation, Marantz has imbued its slim-line AVR with Wi-Fi and improved connectivity. **Steve May** gets all hooked up



WITH SALES OF traditional home cinema amps shrinking, AV brands have been looking for ways to curry favour with disenchanted cinemaniacs. One solution is to add Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, the other is to embrace a leaner form factor. Here Marantz has done both.

The 7 x 50W NR1605 carries the traditional chubby-cheeked Marantz cosmetics. The HDMI count runs to eight inputs, but only one output. A front-mounted USB port can be used to stream music files from a connected drive.

The receiver now supports 4K/60Hz HDMI 2.0 passthrough via those rear HDMI, anticipating a time when you'll actually have a 2,160p source, and offers 4K upscaling (to 30Hz) should you not trust your screen to do the job for you.

The user interface is slicker than an otter's pocket. From the outset, the NR1605 guides you through configuration, gently prompting speaker setup and sources, as well as

Audyssey calibration, which comes MultEQ flavoured. I'm slowly warming to the versatility of MultEQ. Here, the main Reference setting does a solid job, although I found defeating it altogether, or experimenting with the Flat and Left/Right Bypass options,

can result in a rather fuller and occasionally more exciting sound.

While the NR1605 won't blow the bloody doors off, it does seem a tad more dynamic than its predecessor. As Vin Diesel races through the gears at the start of *Fast & Furious 6* (Blu-ray), the NR1605 has no problem keeping pace and accelerating hard.

It goes without saying that the NR1605 will handle the current popular surround formats of DTS-HD Master Audio and the Dolby TrueHD family. While it's not Atmos capable, you can apply Dolby Pro-Logic IIz if you prefer front height speakers to rear backs.

As part of the 'simply does it' ethos, there are no swathes of DSP to contend with here. Audio presets are limited to Movie, Music and Games, with all-channel stereo, Dolby Pro-Logic, DTS Neo 6: Music and Virtual options; all have various traits. If nothing appeals there's always Direct.

Network functionality ticks the right boxes. The model is AirPlay compliant, supports Spotify Connect, and has 'net radio services registered. The AVR happily streamed AIFF, MP3, FLAC, ALAC and WMA from my NAS.

The Marantz is enjoyable with music. Lenny Kravitz's *Are You Gonna Go My Way* (Pure Audio Blu-ray) was delivered with acidic licks that'll test the mettle of any speakers. It also coped surprisingly well with a complex classical DSD download from 2L, playing with extreme clarity from a connected USB drive.

The NR1605 is a real-world star, and easily Marantz's best slim model yet ■

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY TRUEHD: Yes
DTS-HD MASTER AUDIO: Yes
THX: No
MULTICHANNEL INPUT: No
POWER OUTPUT (CLAIMED): 7 x 50W (eight ohms)
MULTIROOM: Yes. Second audio zone
HDMI: 8 x inputs; 1 x output
DIGITAL AUDIO INPUTS: 1 x optical; 1 x coaxial
VIDEO UPSCALING: Yes. To 4K
COMPONENT VIDEO: 2 x inputs, 1 x output
DIMENSIONS: 440(w) x 106(h) x 376(d)mm
WEIGHT: 8.6kg
FEATURES: Audyssey MultEQ with Dynamic Volume/DynamicEQ; built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth; Ethernet; Spotify Connect; internet radio; AirPlay; FM tuner, DLNA and USB file playback (includes hi-res DSD, AIFF, FLAC, WAV and ALAC); gapless playback; Android/iOS remote app; Pure Direct mode; compressed audio enhancer; HDMI passthrough; GUI overlay on HDMI

HCC VERDICT

Marantz NR1605

→ £600 Approx → www.marantz.co.uk
 → Tel: 02890 279830

HIGHS: Entertaining, lively multichannel performance; 4K/60Hz HDMI passthrough; Wi-Fi convenience; capable audio streamer; responsive user interface

LOWS: No 5GHz wireless support; no HDCP 2.2 copy protection; no Double DSD support

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 7.2-channel slim-line AVR

POSITIONING: Marantz's sleeky flagship, below the full-fat SR series

PEERS: Pioneer VSX-S510; Yamaha RX-S600; Sony STR-DN1050



All aboard for Atmos

Onkyo's TX-NR838 ushers in Dolby Atmos at the £1,000 price point. **Steve May**'s ears prick up and he begins rearranging his cinema room speakers

AV INFO

PRODUCT:

£1,000 seven-channel Atmos AV receiver

POSITION:

Middle of Onkyo's Dolby Atmos range

PEERS:

Denon AVR-X4100W; Pioneer SC-LX58; Yamaha RX-A2040

The TX-NR838's handset is refreshingly button-lite

WITH APOLOGIES TO Tom Cruise, welcome to the edge of tomorrow. Dolby Atmos, the sound system which has taken theatrical audio to another level courtesy of object-based design and metadata-driven image placement, has migrated to the home, and nothing will ever sound quite the same again.

Dolby Atmos-ready AV receivers have been released from the majority of AV brands (we're still waiting for Sony), but the first to arrive on our test bench came from Onkyo. The £1,000 TX-NR838 is an upper-class proposition, strategically positioned above the brand's TX-NR737 and entry-level Atmos-ready TX-NR636 models. It's a seven-channel design capable of delivering either extended 7.1 surround or a 5.1.2 Atmos soundstage (the last two numbers refer to the Atmos channels). As befits its price, the overall spec is good and it's not short of muscle. Onkyo rates the power output at 150W 'Dynamic' into eight Ohms, or

130W with all channels driven. I rate it meaty enough to easily drive the average room.

The receiver is 4K-friendly, courtesy of four HDMI 2.0 inputs, and offers HDCP 2.2 (High-bandwidth Digital Content Protection) support on Input 3 (labelled STR/DVR). Onkyo is making noise about being the only AVR brand offering this level of futureproofing. It does, however, remain to be seen how much of an issue HDCP 2.2 will be and it can't be checked now for obvious reasons. Beneath the lid lurks a Silicon Image HDCP 2.2 chipset which handles 2160p up to 60fps with 4:2:0 subsampling.

Get to the speaker binding posts and things are intriguing. In addition to the standard L/C/R terminals you'll find Surround and Surround Back options, plus Height and Width. As this model only offers seven channels of power, not all can be driven at the same time; you need to choose your preferred configuration. It's not possible to implement a dual seven-channel and Atmos home cinema layout.



The TX-NR838 is network savvy. In addition to Bluetooth, there's Spotify Connect, Deezer, Aupeol, internet radio and local LAN media playback (audio only). In addition to Ethernet, the AVR has integrated Wi-Fi, so getting online should not prove problematic.

However, it's the Dolby Atmos performance which is of prime interest. Short story long: Atmos is the most significant development in home theatre since the introduction of Dolby Digital 5.1, elevating the listening experience (literally) to a new level and relegating previous height and width adventures with Pro-Logic IIz

'I believe the days of buying a non-Dolby Atmos-enabled AV receiver are drawing rapidly to a close'

and Audyssey DSX to interesting diversions. But implementing it successfully is no cakewalk. Long story short: for serious home cinemaphiles there are issues to address.

Much depends on your home cinema layout. My theatre happens to be a dedicated room with in-wall and in-ceiling speakers arranged in a traditional 7.2 configuration. On paper at least, it's a relatively straightforward task to re-purpose two in-ceilings to accommodate the 5.1.2 output of the TX-NR838. In practice, though, a number of issues become apparent.

It's demo time!

Dolby Atmos-encoded software is rather thin on the ground at present. Indeed, for this audition I had only a demonstration disc to play with. However, it contains all the various theatrical identents used in Atmos cinemas (including *Amaze*, *Leaf* and *Conductor*), in addition to a short Red Bull F1 promo and *Bailando*, a dance track from Enrique Iglesias. Not a lot to go on, but these are early days.

The first surprise was discovering just how much better the system sounds with reflective speakers delivering the height ambience, compared to in-ceilings. The latter proved too directional, localizing the audio sent to the height channel in a way that was often distracting. While it would be presumptuous to rule out in-ceilings altogether (I suspect I'll find a subliminal output level that convinces, alternatively a 5.1.4 configuration may be more suitable), it became apparent that Onkyo's dinky SKH-410s were doing a better job. These have an angled driver designed to bounce audio off the ceiling (2.4m high in my room), aided by some complimentary processing in the AVR.

The positioning of these boxes provides its own challenge. It's widely envisaged that they'll be positioned atop the front stereo pair. In my room, that wasn't an option. However,

simulating the position with the little Onks on loudspeaker stands didn't appear to work. With my prime listening position approx 4.5m away from the L/C/R, it was clear they were too distant for any sonic reflection to be effective. Yet bringing these speakers to within 2m of my listening position made a dramatic difference.

The Dolby Atmos soundstage itself is quite unlike traditional 5.1. Although we talk blithely of height channels, there's not a sense of tiered audio. Image placement is simply more realistic. The effect is not unlike wearing good headphones, albeit without the physical sensation of earcups. When a mosquito buzzes at the start of the forest clip *Amaze*, the insect appears to dance around your head, moving on an unpredictable vector; then an exotic bird does a complete and seamless fly-around. When the thunderstorm breaks, the LFE rumble is prodigiously deep, before rainfall appears to engulf the listening room.

Leaf, the ident used to preface *Brave* (the first Atmos-encoded movie to be released theatrically), is similarly immersive. A twig crisply breaks to your front right, sending the titular leaf on its downward spiral; you can almost feel the air pressure as it moves around the soundstage, before landing with a deep bass ripple front-left. I played these clips endlessly for days, and never stopped grinning.

Sonically, the TX-NR838 is very adept, capable of crisp, delicate nuance and tumultuous drama. In stereo mode it's surprisingly articulate, thanks in part to some lovely Burr-Brown 192kHz/24-bit DAC magic. It revels in unplugged sessions and light classics alike; in straight multichannel mode it's a rock-solid actioneer. Add Dolby Atmos to the mix and it becomes even more extraordinary.

The TX-NR838 can also upmix 5.1 content. Confusingly this process is simply labelled Dolby Surround in the menu. Quite how convincing said upmixing is versus a native Atmos mix remains open to debate, although using the Atmos channel with 5.1 content appears to add spatial depth.

The only catch, of course, is that the physical arrangement I landed upon as optimum for Atmos performance is not something that would work in most homes. Having reflective height speakers positioned almost mid-room is impractical. Conversely, I suspect that an Atmos 5.1.2 configuration in a smaller space is not only going to work well, but will be easier to set up. I can't vouch for what will happen if you have artex, though, and woe betide you if your ceiling has any sort of Atmos-killing acoustic treatment.

Even without Dolby Atmos compatibility, this Onkyo would be a formidable sonic proposition. Design, features and performance are all solid. However, in full Atmos guise it thrills with extraordinary precision and presence. I predict the days of buying a non-Dolby Atmos AVR are drawing to a close ■

ON THE MENU



→ Onkyo's menu system sports a functional but clean design. System configuration is aided by room layout graphics, which include a replica upfiring speaker...

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY TRUE HD: Yes. Plus Dolby Atmos

DTS-HD MASTER AUDIO: Yes

THX: Yes. Select2

MULTICHANNEL INPUT: No

POWER OUTPUT (CLAIMED):

7 x 150W (eight ohms)

MULTIROOM: Yes. Two additional AV zones

HDMI: 7 x inputs; 2 x outputs

DIGITAL AUDIO INPUTS: 3 x optical;

2 x coaxial

VIDEO UPSCALING: Yes. To 4K

COMPONENT VIDEO: 1 x input; 1 x output

DIMENSIONS: 435(w) x 400(d) x 198.5(h)mm

WEIGHT: 15.5kg

FEATURES: AccuEQ auto-calibration system; Bluetooth; integrated 2.4GHz Wi-Fi; Ethernet; USB; Spotify Connect; internet radio; AM/FM tuner; HDCP 2.2 copy protection; QDeo video processing; twin LFE outputs; IR input; 12V trigger output; RS232 port; Burr-Brown 192kHz/24-bit DAC; 4 x DSP gaming modes; GUI overlay on HDMI; PLL (Phase Locked Loop) anti-jitter tech; seven-channel phono output

HCC VERDICT



Onkyo TX-NR838

→ £1,000 Approx → www.onkyo.co.uk

→ Tel: 08712 001996

HIGHS: Immersive Dolby Atmos performance; four 4K/60p inputs; good network specification with Bluetooth; HDCP 2.2 copy protection

LOWS: No support for dual-band 5.6GHz Wi-Fi; Atmos configuration takes time to tune; you'll need to sacrifice conventional 7.1 to go 5.1.2

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Celebrating pure audio

Primare's lush-looking SPA23 is an unapologetically stripped-down home cinema amplifier.

Steve May appreciates its highly-priced economy



PRIMARE, PURVEYOR OF high-end AV and hi-fi, isn't a noted follower of fashion. Its stock in trade is immaculately built and designed components for the connoisseur. While this philosophy has a natural affinity with two-channel hi-fi, it's a less easy fit with AV, where features and functions are typically stacked higher than Godzilla's galoshes.

The SPA23 wears its attributes on its sleeve. This is a beautiful-looking home cinema amp: the distinctive Primare bullet knobs bookend the unit's display, which itself is large and legible. On the back panel, Primare has swept away the forest of legacy inputs which routinely blight AVRs. This amplifier offers five HDMI inputs and two outputs. All are v1.4 offerings, so no talk of 4K passthrough or ARC here. They will, however, tolerate 3D signals.

It's a standard 5.1 design, with each channel rated at 120W into 8 ohms. This isn't a fantasy figure. The SPA23 can make grown-up speakers bleed, as I found out when I selected

Linkin Park Live in Texas with the volume unwittingly ramped up. The blast was loud enough to stampede cattle.

Performance is outstanding. The SPA23 effortlessly paints a wide, dynamic soundstage. *P5HNG ME A*WY*, from the band's CD/DVD pack, has a

driving urgency that demonstrates the SPA23's ability to ringfence vocal clarity regardless how forceful the metal wrapper. The same track from the accompanying live DVD, in DD 5.1, offers even greater delineation. Similarly, *Numb* drops fast, deep and tight, with the ambiance of the stadium venue entirely convincing.

Digital diva

The SPA23 is one of a new breed of Class D amps from Primare designated as UFPD (Ultra Fast Power Device). The combination of digital amplification and switch-mode power supply might once have raised eyebrows at high-end hi-fi soirees, but in truth premium digital amplification can sound extremely exciting and the tech offers practical benefits in terms of efficiency and heat management. Of course, poorly implemented digital amps can also sound metallic and glassy. Here, UFPD keeps distortion uniformly low irrespective of load, evidently helping vocal performance.

And UFPD sounds lithe and entertaining. During the opening sequence for *Star Trek: Into Darkness* Kirk and Bones flee from an unruly tribe intent on skewering them; spears whistle cleanly from front to rear. As the VFX grow in scale, so does the audio. When the erupting volcano roils around Spock, the shuttle craft spins around the soundfield, its engines evidently doing some heavy lifting from LCR to right rear, all seamlessly muscular.

The SPA23 predictably snubs the trend of ubiquitous auto calibration. It takes a more frugal approach to setup, but it's not all sackcloth and ashes. The menu is a clean

textual affair, covering all the required input, audio, video and speaker settings, plus control/zone 2 configuration. The video input allows you to not only assign and rename sources, but set equipment triggers, AV delay (in ms) and default audio processing, be it stereo, all-channel party mode, Pro-Logic IIx or Neo: 6. Similarly, individual level and distance for speakers can be managed. You can alter the size and crossover for left, right and sub, plus centre and surrounds, in 10Hz increments.

Class-leading clarity

Primare's SPA23 is an uncomplicated home cinema amp, enlivened by slick design and ingenious amplification tech. It's unlikely to be shortlisted by badge-hunters, but will appeal to those after a premium 5.1 experience. It's fit, fast and capable of class-leading clarity ■

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY TRUEHD: Yes
DTS-HD MASTER AUDIO: Yes
THX: No

MULTICHANNEL INPUT: Yes. 7.1 analogue inputs

POWER OUTPUT (CLAIMED): 5 x 120W (eight ohms)

MULTIROOM: Yes. Second audio zone

HDMI: 5 x inputs; 2 x outputs

DIGITAL AUDIO INPUTS: 3 x optical;

3 x coaxial

VIDEO UPSCALING: Yes. To 1080p

COMPONENT VIDEO: No

DIMENSIONS: 430(w) x 385(d) x 180(h)mm

WEIGHT: 15kg

ALSO FEATURING: 3 x 12V triggers; RS232 and IR control; UFPD amplifier technology; Bypass mode; Power Factor Control technology

HCC VERDICT

Primare SPA23

→ £3,500 Approx → www.karma-av.co.uk
→ Tel: 01423 358 846

HIGHS: Dynamic, articulate presentation with acres of headroom; beautiful build quality and design; a doddle to use

LOWS: Limited specification – no network functionality, no HDMI standby passthrough and no 4K compatibility

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Premium 5.1-channel home cinema amplifier

POSITION: Currently top of the Primare AV range

PEERS: Arcam FMJ AVR750; Anthem MRX-710; Denon AVR-4520

THE SEVENOAKS

SALE

FOR THE LATEST SALE PRICES AND OFFERS,
CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STORE OR VISIT
WWW.SSAV.COM

GREAT SAVINGS IN-STORE AND ONLINE

**HALF
PRICE**

LIMITED
STOCK

AV Receiver
Sony STR-DA5800ES
£1099 SAVE £1100



Amplifier/DAC
NAD D 3020
£399

Claim Free
AKG Y50 Headphones
Worth £79.95



Digital Sound Projector
Yamaha YSP-3300
£599
Silver Finish

**SAVE
£400**

Also Available:
Yamaha YSP-4300 £769 • SAVE £530



Wireless Speaker System with Dock
B&W Zeppelin Air
£349.95
Lightning
Connector Model

**SAVE
£150**



LIMITED
STOCK



WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014
Multi-room systems
Best multi-room system up to £500
Sonos

Wireless Streaming Music System
Sonos

**One year of
music included**

Buy any Sonos player and claim 365 days
of Deezer Premium+ worth over £100



HURRY! OFFER ENDS 31/12/2014

Wireless Streaming Music System
Bluesound

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Multi-room systems
Best multi-room system £500+
Bluesound



TIDAL
Includes three months
of music from Tidal
Worth £60



PLEASE NOTE: SOME BRANDS/PRODUCTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. SPECIAL/ADDED VALUE OFFERS ARE NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER (NICWAOO). ADVERT VALID UNTIL 14/01/2015. E&OE

**click &
collect**
NOW AVAILABLE

www.SSAV.com

SEVENOAKS
SOUND & VISION

SAVE £318



The Yamaha BD-S677 3D Blu-ray Player offers Miracast and advanced network functions. The RX-V677 is a 7.2 Channel Network AV Receiver with Wi-Fi Built-In. It Supports the latest HDMI version, 4K upscaling, AirPlay and HTC Connect. KEF's E305 is a 5.1 Speaker Package based on KEF's new 4.25" Uni-Q driver array combined with a superlative matching sub woofer.



PACKAGE DEAL

Blu-ray Player/AV Receiver
& 5.1 Speaker Package

**Yamaha BD-S677
Yamaha RX-V677
KEF E305**

£1399



BD-CF Bluetooth

Canton DM 50 Soundbase

Also Available:
Canton DM 75 £SSAV

£SSAV



BD-CF Bluetooth

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

**Yamaha
YSP-2500 Soundbar**

Also Available:
Yamaha SRT-1000 Soundbase £SSAV

£SSAV

SAVE £238

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Blu-ray Player/AV Receiver
& 5.1 Speaker Package

**Sony BDP-S7200
Sony STR-DN1050
B&W MT-50**

£1599

PACKAGE DEAL



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Blu-ray players
Best Blu-ray player £150-£300
Sony BDP-S7200

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Home cinema amplifiers
Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700
Sony STR-DN1050

Speaker packages
Best style package £1000-£1400
Bowers & Wilkins MT-50

SAVE £450



TRADE IN OFFER

Arcam AV Receiver

FMJ AVR450

Also Available:
Arcam FMJ AVR750 £SSAV Trade in price **£1749**



DOLBY ATMOS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Pioneer AV Receiver

SC-LX58

Also Available:
Pioneer SC-LX88 £SSAV

£SSAV

SAVE £499



Blu-ray Player & AV Receiver

**NAD T 567
NAD T 758**

£999

The NAD T 567 3D Blu-ray Player is everything you would expect from NAD; an affordable and solid machine packed with the latest technology and digital innovation. Everything about the T 567 spells quality.

The T 758 is a performance update to NAD's award-winning T 757 AV Receiver and continues their 'simple is better' design philosophy. It's Modular Design Construction gives the ability to easily upgrade the T 758 to include future digital formats, the answer to technology obsolescence.

PACKAGE DEAL

SAVE £150

Subwoofer
**PSB
SubSeries1**
£149



LIMITED STOCK

SAVE £50

Subwoofer
**REL
T-Zero**
£249



click & collect
NOW AVAILABLE

www.SSAV.com

THE SEVENOAKS SALE

FOR THE LATEST SALE PRICES AND OFFERS,
CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STORE OR VISIT
WWW.SSAV.COM

Samsung UHD TV Curved

Ultra High Definition 4K



VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM FOR LATEST
TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES

SAMSUNG

HU8500 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

Introducing a breakthrough in TV viewing that will change the way you watch TV forever – the Samsung HU8500 Curved UHD. Wider viewing angles, pure and accurate colour reproduction and a sense of depth never experienced before are only possible on a curved Samsung screen, specifically shaped for UHD viewing at its very best.

55 65 78 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM FOR LATEST
TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES

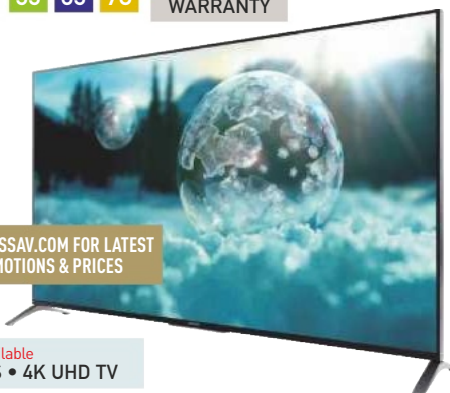
SONY 4K

X8 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

The new Sony X8 series 4K UHD LED TV boasts four times more detail than Full HD, 4K gives stunningly natural images, not pixels. Dramatically higher image quality means that you can sit closer to the screen, filling more of your field of view until the screen disappears and you are enjoying an at-the-movies experience.

49 55 65 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

Also Available
SONY X9 SERIES • 4K UHD TV



VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM FOR LATEST
TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES

SONY

S90 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

The new S90 is Sony's first ever range of curved TVs. Available in two screen sizes: 65in and 75in, the S90 series boasts 4K Ultra HD resolution. Features and specifications include Sony's 4K X-Reality PRO picture engine, Triluminos colour technology, Motionflow XR800Hz, edge-lit LED backlighting, active 3D and a detachable Skype camera.

Sound is provided by Sony's new 4.2-channel multi-angle live speaker system which allows for "expansive, uncompromised 360-degree surround sound". Other features include Sony's Social Viewing for watching with friends over Skype, Live Football Mode, One-touch mirroring and Photo share.

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY 4K 65 75



VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM FOR LATEST
TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES

SONY • W7 SERIES • FULL HD TV

32 42 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM FOR LATEST
TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES

PANASONIC • AX802 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

50 58 65 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM FOR LATEST
TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES

SAMSUNG • HU7500 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

48 55 65 75 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

FOR THE LATEST PRICES AND OFFERS VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STORE

Christmas Hours Sunday Opening

Many stores are open on
Sundays during December.
Please visit our website for
the latest information.

www.ssav.com

Stores Nationwide

We have a national network of
stores and a hard-won reputation
for outstanding customer service.

Website

Visit our website for a stream-
lined on-line experience with an
outstanding product selection
plus the latest product news
and store information.

Bishop's Stortford • 01279 506576
Bristol • 0117 974 3727
Brighton 01273 733338
Bromley 020 8290 1988
Cambridge • 01223 304770
Chelsea • 020 7352 9466
Cheltenham • 01242 241171
Chorleywood • 0845 5046364
Epsom • 01372 720720
Exeter • 01392 218895

Guildford 01483 536666
Holborn • 020 7837 7540
Kingston • 020 8547 0717
Leeds (Wetherby) 01937 586886
Loughton • 020 8532 0770
Maidstone 01622 686366
Norwich • 01603 767605
Oxford 01865 241773
Reading • 0118 959 7768
Sevenoaks 01732 459555

Sheffield • 0114 255 5861
Southampton • 023 8033 7770
Tunbridge Wells 01892 531543
Weybridge 01932 840859
Witham (Essex) 01376 501733
Yeovil • 01935 700078

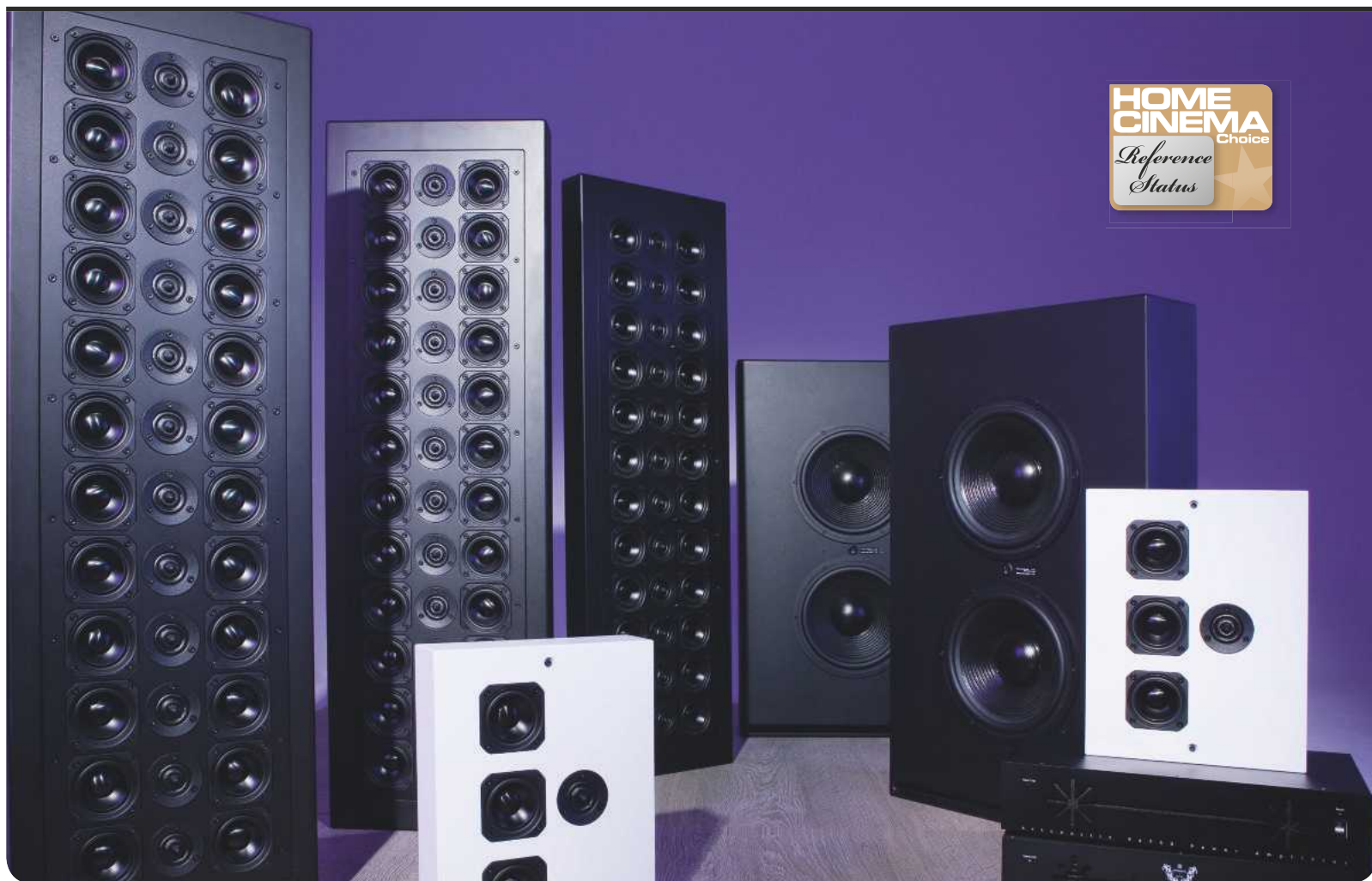
Visit WWW.SSAV.COM FOR ADDRESS DETAILS, OPENING
HOURS AND BRANDS STOCKED

*THESE STORES ARE FRANCHISED AND OPERATE UNDER
A LICENCE AGREEMENT TO SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION

Please Note: Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added
value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAOO).

ADVERT VALID UNTIL 14/01/2015. E&OE

SEVENOAKS
SOUND & VISION



Standing proud

Mark Craven looks for high-end cinema speakers that both sound great and provide discreet installation options. Danish brand Artcoustic wants to help

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
On-wall/in-wall 7.2 speaker system

POSITION:
The Spitfire SL models come in three flavours – the 24-12s are the flagship

PEERS:
DALI Rubicon LCR; Image Audio IAB

ARTCOUSTIC IS WELL known for its living room-friendly on-wall speakers that can be specified with custom grilles to match your room's décor – indeed, you could argue it's perhaps too well-known for them. There's a temptation to see any company with products that wouldn't look out of place in an interior design mag (especially with a name like Artcoustic) as, well, not a proper home cinema player. Yet that couldn't be further from the truth.

While Artcoustic will happily sell you a stereo pair of wall-hung monitors in a variety of colours, it's equally keen to help you achieve home cinema heaven, via its larger-scale cabinets that are designed to fit behind a projector screen and make light work of the most raucous Blu-ray soundtracks. And it's that sort of array that's on test here.

Unusually for a loudspeaker manufacturer, Artcoustic doesn't go down the 'top, middle and bottom' route when it comes to its range. Every model it offers (from a lineup that's 30+ strong) is, in some regard, the same speaker.

How so? Because Artcoustic employs the same drivers across all its cabinets – dual ring radiator tweeters and 3in midbass units in its speakers, and 10in low-frequency drivers in its passive subwoofers. As you step up through the range, the cabinet size increases and the number of drivers grows.

This approach is designed to ensure the speakers can hit very high SPLs. Adding more drivers improves the sensitivity – to a claimed 110dB in the case of the L/C/R models reviewed here – and allowing it to be driven to reference level without requiring a collection of Lake Michigan-sized power amps.

The system tested here is 7.2 (although our photography only includes two of the four surrounds), with the stars of the show being the Spitfire 24-12 SLs. These enclosures are designed for cinema rooms only. They're grille-less and feature a more durable finish than alternative (but technically identical) models offered for rooms where they will be installed on show. Each presents a front baffle jam-packed with drivers. Twenty-four mids and 12 tweeters to be exact, hence the name. The Spitfire lineup also offers two smaller models with fewer drivers – the voice-matching means you can build a system tailored to your room's needs.

The 24-12s are on front soundstage duty, and in this instance partnered with a quartet of Diablo SL on-wall speakers and a pair of

'Detail retrieval and the articulation of movie effects are the standout performance trait here'

Spitfire subs. The former are less sensitive, but will typically be installed nearer the listening position – more potent Artcoustic surround speakers are offered. The latter are passive designs, front-ported and with twin 10in bass drivers, and fed by separate rack-mountable power amplifiers totting 750W a-piece.

Controlled aggression

As you'd expect from an array with a £17,000 price tag, the Artcoustic SLs are highly impressive. That high quotient of tweeters and midbass drivers does what the manufacturer intends – enable high-volume, home cinema heroics without ever sounding like it's getting out of control.

Detail retrieval and the articulation of movie effects are perhaps the standout performance trait here. With *Oblivion*, this means the environments created by director Joseph Kosinski and his sound team are alive with clean, delicate – but forceful when needed – noises, making this tale of Tom Cruise moping around a desolate Earth as real-sounding as it can. The rain spattering on his craft's windscreen and the crackling lightning of the storm are succinctly delivered, as are his crunching footsteps and the whistling wind as he trudges across the planet's surface.

The soundstage created is both wide and deep, able to involve you unhesitatingly in the onscreen action. For instance, when Cruise drops into the sinkhole, tracking the beeps of the beacon, the Artcoustics help build the tension, conveying the space of the underground library with smooth pans and a pronounced sense of atmosphere. Sounds

hang in the room, rather than stumbling forward sheepishly from the screen. This system has a handy knack of revelling in quiet periods, painting a sonic picture, before bursting into life with shocking dynamism.

This sinkhole sequence features what AV fans will know is a great subwoofer showcase – the descending bass note that illustrates our hero plummeting back underground when his rope snaps. The twin drivers here absolute nail it, maintaining their serious output as the tone drops and drops, exciting the air around you. While it's not up there with the very best subwoofer performance, missing out on that visceral power and size that premium models can offer, it's entirely commensurate with the relatively affordable price point.

For a more bombastic sound mix I turned to *Fast & Furious Five* and its dramatic dragging-a-bank-vault-down-the-street sequence. This proved utterly fabulous, especially after nudging the volume up a notch – the Artcoustics seemed to delight in the extra power, finding more punch and scale. Gunshots hit hard and fast, with a spine-tingling impact that's exactly what the AV doctor ordered.

Imaging is excellent. As Vin Diesel and Paul Walker thrash their cars through Rio de Janeiro, these speakers track their throaty engines and the spinning, tumbling vault all around the soundfield without a gap in the delivery – a benefit, surely, of the timbre-matching throughout the Artcoustic lineup. The subs have work to do here, and the way they add tight, fleeting thumps to each collision is first-rate, devoid of overhang.

Dialogue is delivered with believability and verve, and that behind-the-screen placement of the centre channel and L/R speakers really helps locate it to where it's meant to be. Whether it's Idris Elba's stagey shouting in *Pacific Rim*, Andrea Riseborough's headset chatter in *Oblivion* or Billy Connolly's gruff King Fergus in Pixar's *Brave*, the result is natural-sounding voices with presence.

The sound of music

Switching from movies to music gives the SLs a better opportunity to showcase their full-range delivery. Run-throughs of *Jack The Ripper* (Grooverider) and *Swamp Music* (Lynyrd Skynyrd) elicit a wide grin. Hi-hats and other percussive effects are picked out from a smooth, clean midrange. The guitars and vocals of the '70s rock anthem, and the synths and weird, guttural grunts of the drum 'n' bass track, sound real and are thrust forward in the mix, while delicate sounds, such as fingers sliding along a guitar string, aren't lost in the melee. However, with the Artcoustic speakers very much erring on the side of neutral when it comes to tone (and the fact that being installed on-wall means you can't toe them in), it's perhaps not the most emotive hi-fi listen at this price point. Equally, you could

argue that a custom-built cinema isn't the proper venue for critical music listening.

One for your shortlist

If you're serious about home cinema at the premium level and are planning a projector-based dedicated room, then these need to be on your shortlist. The slimmed-down design (the original Spitfire models were nearly twice as deep) will make them easier than ever to install, and Artcoustic's modular approach means your installer should be able to specify a config that's most apt for your space (and may therefore be a more affordable package).

What the Artcoustic array offers is welcome – potent, room-filling sound with a nod to setup and room design. It's no-compromise AV that understands the compromises – and standards required – of a dedicated room ■

SPECIFICATIONS

SPITFIRE 24-12 SL

DRIVE UNITS: 24 x 3in midbass drivers; 12 x 1in dual ring radiator tweeters
ENCLOSURE: Sealed, line-array
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 65Hz-40kHz
SENSITIVITY: 110dB
POWER HANDLING: N/A
DIMENSIONS: 1,126(h) x 350(w) x 67(d)mm
WEIGHT: 15kg

DIABLO SL

DRIVE UNITS: 3 x 3in midbass drivers; 1 x 1in dual ring radiator tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 50Hz-40kHz
SENSITIVITY: 88dB
POWER HANDLING: N/A
DIMENSIONS: 360(h) x 270(w) x 67(d)mm
WEIGHT: 4.5kg

SPITFIRE SL SUB

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 10in long-throw bass drivers
ENCLOSURE: Slot-ported (front)
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 25Hz-120Hz
ONBOARD POWER: Driven by separate 750W power amp
REMOTE CONTROL: No
DIMENSIONS: 844(h) x 500(w) x 150(d)mm
WEIGHT: 30kg
CONNECTIONS: Stereo speaker-level input

HCC VERDICT

Artcoustic Spitfire SL 7.2

→ £17,000 Approx → www.artcoustic.com
 → Tel: 01245 400904

HIGHS: Large-scale surround sound with dynamism and excellent detail; modular ethos improves system flexibility; sensitive design helps amp matching

LOWS: Passive subs means you have to find rack space for separate amps; neutral tone won't suit some hi-fi tastes

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



Fire up the Quattro!

Adam Rayner gets to grips with a cinema speaker system that features no less than twenty-eight tweeters – and two insane subwoofers

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
High-end 7.2 array
for dedicated rooms

POSITION:
Top of the Kreisel
Sound lineup

PEERS:
Procella Audio P10/
P8/P6;
Monitor Audio
Platinum PL200 AV;
B&W 800 Series

A SPEAKER DESIGNER tends to have an area it's best at, be it high-end tweeters, like Bowers & Wilkins' vapour-deposited Diamond contraptions, or heart-stopping bass drivers, like pretty much anything proffered by Velodyne or REL. Yet some excel in all areas – and their products deserve attention.

I was impressed a while back by a set of Aurum speakers from Quadral that seemed to address all the frequencies in equal levels of engineering excellence, but that system was beyond twice the price of what we're reviewing here. This Quattro array from Kreisel Sound, the company helmed by Ken Kreisel (the K in the original M&K), is the latest and most advanced iteration of the man's very own take on speaker design. And it is probably unique in home audio.

A system of absolute excellence that covers all your home cinema needs, from slicing highs of great accuracy to bass that makes you believe a Bugatti 'space car' has just crashed through your living room. More on that later.

This seven-channel array comprises mostly compact enclosures, plus two very large subwoofers, although the brand does suggest you consider a 7.4 system, or even bigger. Indeed, this product line was designed with the immersive hecticcy of 11-channel audio in mind, with dedicated 'height' speakers part of the catalogue.

It's got more drivers than Tiger Woods

Set up, the first thing you'll notice are the clusters of soft dome tweeters in each

loudspeaker's front face, alongside one or two 5.25in paper cone drivers. The fronts in this package are the left- and right-delineated Quattro KK-Q125s. These can be used with optional £500 stands (as in our photography) designed to hold that amount of tweeter energy, and they utilise two of those midbass drivers. The centre (Quattro KK-125C) is essentially the same speaker but horizontal, and equipped with a shallow plate stand.

To the sides, we've used the Quattro KK-Q125 TriFX surrounds, and for rears the Quattro KK-Q85s (distributor L Sound sells the speakers separately, so you can build

'This array is startling – beautifully made and with immense scale, weight, detail and impact'

your own preferred array). The latter are an asymmetrical trapezoidal shape, designed to be wall-mounted above your listening position.

The TriFX cabinets feature a 3in driver on each flank, as well as the full complement of drivers (a 5.25in mid plus four tweeters) to the fore. Depending upon the jumper position, you can choose between the trademarked TriFX mode, which is a side radiation-plus-front output to give dipolar surround with focus as well; classic dipole mode with the front drivers silenced; or direct front mode with the side drivers silenced. However, I feel you would really buy these to make use of all their talents and thus stick with TriFX. I did.

It's worth stressing that the four-tweeter array is not just an ASBO-cluster to make it +12dB, or four times louder. Rather, the aim is to shape the high-frequency output, as well as the synergy of the four, and to cross them over lower down than a normal tweeter array to improve coherency. Each is given its own slightly different signal from the complex interior passive crossover system of capacitors, inductance coils and resistors. This ensures the most-perceived-detail zone of frequencies, the highs most likely to bounce off walls and confuse the soundstage, are marshalled – the sound is aimed into the listening area, reducing energy arriving at a room's walls, increasing focus and perceived detail. It works, and is a pro-audio approach also shared by IMAX.

The subs, called DXD-1202, are prodigious and retail for £2,500-a-piece. Our two were bolted together with meaty fixings and chunks of shapely steel, and four rubber coupling pads. Each has a side-firing 12in driver and another one mounted vertically, adding up to the cone area of one 18in woofer. Each gets a solid 375W RMS from its own Class D amp, to end up with 750W in total. In a stack of two

(the 'duo' arrangement recommended by Kreisel Sound) their drivers are in two opposing pairs, since the second sub goes atop the first, on its head. The two connect via an XLR cord.

Sci-fi stunners

I spun up *Elysium* on Blu-ray. A grubby sci-fi, oddly with some swordplay thrown in, it begins on a dirty Earth where everything looks like a Brazilian favela. You can smell it, so good is the sound design and grimy cinematography. This array impressed immediately with its layered presentation. We see our protagonist as a child with his sweetheart, making promises about escaping to the Elysium habitat where the wealthy live, and the sound of children playing is overlaid by a close-miked voiceover. It is complex and busy but the Kreisel Sound array delivers it all.

From there, the sci-fi vehicles soon arrive. Stumpy jet-equipped craft that look rusty and make a lot of big sounds, especially when they crash. At this point, my room shook hard but completely distortion-free. Missiles are deployed – the sound as the mechanism opens and ejects its load, and the weaponry fires its engines and zooms off, was superbly, absurdly, detailed. Moreover, it was coherent as they wove around the soundfield, and while the speakers were visibly there, the soundstage in the room didn't seem to be connected. The placement of the missiles was absolute.

Later, when our hero is at his job in a robot factory, the locational cues of the machinery around him proved utterly immersive. But the impact of effects was also impressive. The click of a gun priming, and bullets exploding near a target to rip it all to shreds, cut hard but not so it became uncomfortable or ever broke up.

Bass is controlled, accurate and polite despite the power. When the villain's personal spacecraft is shot down – with an EB symbol on the bodywork and current Veyron livery of paint – my room again throbbed, and I positively felt the crunch of gravel beneath it.

Elysium's best sequence to show off the controlled dispersion and razor-sharp accuracy of this system's tweeters comes towards the end. The swoosh of a longsword being taken from its scabbard moves from the left front channel to the centre speaker, the camera moving with it. It takes supreme imaging to shape this and great attack to make it sound sharp – something that the Q125s' tweeter clusters made light work of.

With immense scale and weight as well as detail and impact – plus serious dynamics – this array startles. But then, you do have a fantastic amount of bass power to use and plenty of HF drivers. It is beautifully made and eye-catching to behold. Costly, too, but in truth it represents amazing value in sheer pro-grade output terms. And if you can hide the monster woofers, the rest of the package is surprisingly easy to accommodate ■

SPECIFICATIONS

KK-Q125 LC/RC

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 5.25in paper pulp cone woofers with cast aluminium chassis; 4 x 1in proprietary soft fabric dome tweeters
ENCLOSURE: Two-way, sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 80Hz-25kHz
SENSITIVITY: N/A
POWER HANDLING: N/A
DIMENSIONS (MAX): 160(w) x 423(h) x 190(d)mm
WEIGHT: 7.6kg

KK-Q125C

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 5.25in woofers; 4 x 1in tweeters
ENCLOSURE: Two-way, sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 80Hz-25kHz
SENSITIVITY: N/A
POWER HANDLING: N/A
DIMENSIONS (MAX): 423(w) x 160(h) x 190(d)mm
WEIGHT: 7.6kg

KK-Q125 TRIFX

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 5.25in woofer; 4 x 1in tweeters; 2 x 3in side-firing drivers
ENCLOSURE: Three-way, sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 80Hz-25kHz
SENSITIVITY: N/A
POWER HANDLING: N/A
DIMENSIONS (MAX): 215(w) x 290(h) x 190(d)mm
WEIGHT: 6.5kg

KK-Q85

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 5.25in woofer; 4 x 1in tweeters
ENCLOSURE: Two-way, sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 80Hz-25kHz
SENSITIVITY: N/A
POWER HANDLING: N/A
DIMENSIONS (MAX): 215(w) x 290(h) x 190(d)mm
WEIGHT: 6.5kg

DXD-1202 (SUBWOOFER)

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 12in Push-Pull-Pulsar™ long-throw bass drivers
ENCLOSURE: Sealed. 'Back-Sidefire' design (one driver is in the vertical plane, the other horizontal)
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 10Hz-200Hz
ON BOARD POWER: Dual Class D high-current 375W RMS monoblock amps
DIMENSIONS: 492(w) x 602(h) x 390(d)mm
WEIGHT: 36.6kg
CONNECTIONS: Stereo phono input; XLR balanced input and passthrough

HCC VERDICT

Kreisel Sound Quattro Series 7.2

→ £9,000 Approx → www.lsound.eu
→ Tel: (+47) 377 11 333

HIGHS: Effortless sound with prodigious, controlled bass and incisive accurately-placed highs; impressive build quality; easy to build a tailored package

LOWS: Not an impulse buy; largescale subwoofers

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Crossing the Rubicon

There's no turning back once you've heard DALI's inventive Rubicon LCR speakers, says **Steve May**. On-wall is on trend...



THE RUBICON LCR is quite a departure for DALI. An on-wall design (142mm deep), it's hoping to find a spot in theatre rooms where design is a concern, yet without conceding any performance ground. Each totes a hybrid electrostatic ribbon/soft dome tweeter, plus a 5.5in wood-fibre midbass driver.

The dispersion characteristics of the Rubicons mean they should not be towed in to face the listening position – they're designed to face square-out. Similarly, rears need to stare uniformly back. This positioning creates a huge open soundfield into which you can pitch your tent – the opening car duel in *Fast and Furious 6* is fought on a road that sounds twice as wide as that on more pointy systems. The LCRs do the gutty, gear change thing well too, yet this doesn't interfere with topky tyre-screaming detail. And they stomp the hip-hop soundtrack.

Having identical speakers all around means there's no problem with timbre or phase.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:

On-wall full-range speaker array

POSITION:

Joined by Rubicon floorstanders and bookshelf alternatives

PEERS:

Robson Acoustics Chronos; Monitor Audio Shadow

Panning from front to rear, plus every which way between, is seamless. When the fish sing the funeral march in *Doctor Seuss' The Lorax*, as we ride down a river on our bed (don't ask), the audio doesn't splash or wobble in the slightest; the pan is effortlessly convincing.

The LCRs also drop deeper than you might imagine for such slim cabinets. That said, dedicated LFE is an intrinsic part of any multichannel setup, so for this review DALI supplied the £1,900 SUB P-10 DSS (there is no Rubicon woofer, and buyers are invited to peruse the whole DALI sub range, which begins at £350, choosing based on budget/room size). They also have an uncanny ability to delineate complex mixes. During the bombastic Little Hansel sequence in *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*, the score portentously chimes in after trees have been splintered by the massive missile and Holmes and crew knocked to the floor by the concussive blast. It's a dramatic moment, given extra impact by this Rubicon quintet, not least because the scoring orchestra now appears to be ensconced amid the forestry.

Music material sounds equally enticing. Minus The Bear's *Listing*, a 96kHz/24-bit multichannel DTS track, is rendered wide and spacious, with crisp centre-locked audio and insistent left-side riffing, before the rest of the band take the stage. The speakers sound light and flighty. By contrast, Nine Inch Nails' album *The Slip* (96kHz/24-bit FLAC) is all raw, surging, electronic energy not easily mastered.

So DALI's Rubicon LCR is proof you can achieve epic multichannel audio without sacrificing floor space, bringing an audiophile level of clarity and presence to the on-wall form factor. Capable of superb delineation and spatial imaging, they're thrilling when deployed as a 5.1 setup, and engaging as a two-channel upgrade for any wall-mounted screen ■

SPECIFICATIONS

RUBICON LCR ON-WALL

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x hybrid ribbon/29mm soft dome tweeter; 1 x 5.5in wood-fibre midbass

ENCLOSURE: Sealed, bass reflex

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 59Hz-34kHz

SENSITIVITY: 89dB

POWER HANDLING: 20W-150W

DIMENSIONS: 465(w) x 278(h) x 142(d)mm

WEIGHT: 8kg

SUB P-10 DSS (SUBWOOFER)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 10in carbon-fibre active driver; 2 x 10in carbon-fibre passive drivers

ENCLOSURE: Sealed

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 20Hz-250Hz

ON BOARD POWER: 500W RMS

REMOTE CONTROL: Yes

DIMENSIONS: 370(h) x 340(w) x 340(d)mm

WEIGHT: 19.5kg

CONNECTIONS: Mono phono LFE; stereo phono

HCC VERDICT

DALI Rubicon LCR

→ £6,275 approx → www.dali-speakers.com
→ 0845 644 3537

HIGHS: Full-range performance LCR; sensational detail and spatial imaging; impeccable build quality

LOWS: Ribbon tweeter may be acquired taste; relatively large for on-walls

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Primare SPA23

Celebrating Pure Audio



“the SPA23 can make grown-up speakers bleed. Performance is outstanding. The Primare SPA23 is an unashamedly uncomplicated home cinema amp, enlivened by gorgeous design and ingenious amplification technology. It’s fit, fast and capable of class-leading clarity.”



September 2014

The SPA23’s modular design allows for DSP, video and connections to be upgraded easily with proprietary Primare boards.

karma
audio - visual

karma-av.co.uk

For more information please contact Karma or visit primare.net

Return of the Radius

Taking aim at the high-end sub/sat market, Monitor Audio has overhauled its much-loved Radius range. **Danny Phillips** tries, and fails, to find something to complain about



MONITOR AUDIO'S RADIUS range has proved a firm favourite thanks to its living room-friendly looks and spine-tingling sound quality. Yet the British brand hasn't rested on its laurels, updating the product stable with new designs. This 5.1 package brings together some of these additions, including a reboot of the Radius 90 compact speaker and the new Radius 200 centre speaker. Providing low-end grunt is the Radius 390 subwoofer.

Every speaker is styled with panache. The gleaming gloss-white finish that adorns our sample is pure disco, but the swanky black version is equally dapper. Each speaker is a solid, impenetrable box with no joins or seams aside from the grooved HiVe II port on the back, which appears for the first time on the Radius range. This, says MA, accelerates the flow of air and reduces turbulence for a more dynamic bass response.

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 5.1-channel compact speaker package

POSITION: Above the MASS system but below Apex

PEERS: Wharfedale Diamond 100-HCP; DALI Fazon Mikro

Sub/sat royalty

Pick up the Radius 90 and its heft is satisfying. You'll feel you've got your money's worth before you've listened to it – important, as the £1,500 ticket is at the top of most people's sub/sat budget.

Let loose with the a blockbuster actioner, the R90HT1 proves very accomplished. *Pacific Rim* (BD) is a movie that demands impact and scale – something this system achieves without batting an eyelid. Quite a feat for speakers barely as tall as my AV receiver.

The MAs take great delight in driving the thunderous battle sequences into the room. When *Crimson Typhoon* squares up to Otachi and Leatherback, the clatter of the robot's metal armour and the beast's rasping roars boast remarkable attack and aggression, without sounding bright or synthetic. Furthermore, these speakers display the sort of slam and dynamism you'd expect from larger designs, hitting that sweet spot between excitement and refinement.

The subwoofer plays a part here, of course; it pummels the room with authoritative bass notes delivered with supreme depth and grip, and rumbles away happily during quieter scenes, lending subtle atmosphere and warmth to voices and background music.

And the Radius system has a sideline in poise and insight. *Pacific Rim*'s crowded Hong Kong streets are alive with the sounds of hissing rain, beeping rickshaws and chattering voices, delicately scattered around the soundstage like audio confetti. Idris Elba's nonsense dialogue, meanwhile, is imbued with an almost life-like presence by the Radius 200.

One of the best compact 5.1 systems money can buy? Certainly ■

SPECIFICATIONS

RADIUS 90

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 4in C-CAM bass/mid driver; 1 x 1in C-CAM gold dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Bass reflex, rear-ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 80Hz-35kHz
SENSITIVITY: 83dB
POWER HANDLING: 75W
DIMENSIONS: 125(w) x 198(h) x 140(d)mm
WEIGHT: 2.1kg

RADIUS 200

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 4in C-CAM bass/mid drivers; 1 x 1in C-CAM gold dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Bass reflex, rear-ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 60Hz-35kHz
SENSITIVITY: 86dB
POWER HANDLING: 100W
DIMENSIONS: 330(w) x 125(h) x 140(d)mm
WEIGHT: 3.6kg

RADIUS 390 (SUBWOOFER)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 10in C-CAM long-throw cone driver; 1 x 10in auxiliary bass radiator
ENCLOSURE: Sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 30Hz-120Hz
ON BOARD POWER: 200W
REMOTE CONTROL: No
DIMENSIONS: 330(w) x 348(h) x 345(d)mm
WEIGHT: 13.76kg
CONNECTIONS: Stereo phono inputs; LFE input; 12V trigger

HCC VERDICT

Monitor Audio R90HT1

→ £1,500 Approx → www.monitoraudio.co.uk

→ Tel: 01268 740580

HIGHS: Seamless, coherent soundstage; wonderful detail reproduction; superb bass grip and slam; stunning design

LOWS: Subwoofer Impact mode too imposing; cheaper sub/sat packages are available

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Mr Scott, energize! Who says you can't fly in an armchair: **the Excite 5.1 system.** All there is.



DYNABOARD

It's time to Q the music

Q Acoustics' revamped 5.1 package has a refined, smooth sound that **Ed Selley** discovers works well with both stereo and multichannel material



Don't want white? The Q7000i can be bought in gloss black, too

satellites and the subwoofer is of a high quality. Although despite the curved cabinets, this is not the most visually interesting speaker package on the market.

Smooth mover

In keeping with the theme of evolution rather than revolution, the Q7000i is not radically different from the original 7000 but this is no bad thing.

The performance has the same

smoothness and control that has come to define Q Acoustics speakers, and this gives the 7000i a sense of civility with the bass-heavy insanity of *Man of Steel*. As you might expect with identical drivers all round, the handover from speaker to speaker is seamless and they conjure a convincing surround performance. Dialogue is usually clear and easy to follow and the tonal accuracy of the array is consistently good. Every now and again, you might find yourself craving a little more dynamism and punch, but few packages that can generate that sort of excitement are so refined.

The new subwoofer is deeply impressive, too. It might have lost a fraction of absolute bass extension from the older model but it integrates beautifully with the satellites and augments them without ever dominating the performance. This has the benefit of making the 7000i absolutely superb in stereo – in fact, it's one of the very best affordable 2.1 systems I've spent any time with.

Against these positives, the downsides are limited. The speakers, with their sensitivity rating of 85dB, need a good dollop of amplification to wake up. And by the same token, they sound much more full bodied and spacious with a decent amount of volume behind them. Lower levels can leave soundtracks soft and less well defined.

That said, the Q7000i array should win itself admirers. It hits a lot of right notes, including the tricky business of stereo, and comes in under that key £1,000 price point ■

Q ACOUSTICS IS in the 'difficult third album' phase of its existence at the moment, faced with the task of keeping its speakers at the top of the tree while battling stiffer competition and rising expectations on the part of press and public. The original 7000 Series was highly regarded and now Q Acoustics has been a-fettlin' and the result is the 7000i.

On the face of it, the 7000i doesn't look any different from the original version. The five satellites are still the pill-shaped enclosures from before and mount two midrange units and a tweeter. The drivers are new, though. A ring radiator tweeter is paired with revised midrange drivers featuring increased excursion over the older model.

The 7070Si subwoofer is a significant change over its predecessor. This new bass bin again uses a side-firing driver hidden behind one wall of the chassis, but the driver is now 8in instead of 10in and the side is no longer removable. Cable management and the positioning of the controls has also been improved and the result is a smaller, neater package. The overall fit and finish of the

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Mid-range sub/sat speaker package

POSITION: Similar price to the more traditional 2000i 5.1 array

PEERS: Cabasse Eole 3; KEF E305; DALI Fazon Mikro

SPECIFICATIONS

Q7000LRI

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 3in long-throw midbass drivers; 1 x 1in tweeter

ENCLOSURE: Sealed

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 95Hz-20kHz

SENSITIVITY: 85dB/W

POWER HANDLING: 15-100W

DIMENSIONS: 100(w) x 240(h) x 160(d)mm

WEIGHT: 1.6kg

Q7000Ci

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 3in long-throw midbass drivers; 1 x 1in tweeter

ENCLOSURE: Sealed

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 95Hz-20kHz

SENSITIVITY: 85dB/W

POWER HANDLING: 15-100W

DIMENSIONS: 240(w) x 100 (h) x 160(d)mm

WEIGHT: 1.5kg

Q7070Si (SUBWOOFER)

DRIVE UNIT: 8in doped paper bass driver

ENCLOSURE: Sealed

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 35-200Hz

ON BOARD POWER: 150W

REMOTE CONTROL: No

DIMENSIONS: 198(w) x 320(h) x 460(d)mm

WEIGHT: 13.8kg

CONNECTIONS: Speaker-level input; LFE input

HCC VERDICT

Q Acoustics Q7000i

→ £900 Approx → www.qacoustics.co.uk

→ Tel: 01279 501080

HIGHS: Beautifully integrated and spacious sound; phenomenal in stereo; excellent build quality

LOWS: Slightly soft at low levels; expensive floorstands (£150 per pair); speaker terminals only accept bare wire

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



HARPENDEN • EDGWARE • BECKENHAM



3 times award winner
HOME CINEMA CHOICE
"Best Multiroom Installation"



THE BEST HOME CINEMA CHOICE

With 3 showrooms and 7 demonstration rooms, featuring all the latest systems and award winning separates from the world's leading manufacturers, we promise every customer the finest entertainment experience. Whatever your budget, whether you simply want a new radio or a complete Home Entertainment installation, we're here to help.

**HIFI • HOME CINEMA • MULTIROOM AUDIO • HOME AUTOMATION
LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEMS • A/V DESIGN & CONSULTANCY**

Musical Images Showrooms Opening times 9.30am - 5.30am. Monday - Saturday

82 High Street, Harpenden
Hertfordshire AL5 2SP

Tel: 01582 764246 **NEW SHOWROOM**

harpenden@musicalimages.co.uk

173 Station Road, Edgware
Middlesex HA8 7JX

Tel: 020 8952 5535

edgware@musicalimages.co.uk

126 High Street, Beckenham
Kent BR3 1EB

Tel: 020 8663 3777

beckenham@musicalimages.co.uk

www.musical-images.co.uk

musical images

@musical_images

Audio Visual Lifestyle Ltd trading as Musical Images. Finance options available, subject to status. E&OE



"Ultimate Range"
of Tab Tensioned In-ceiling Screens

**SSP from
Only £1,416.00**

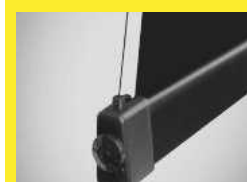
For when only the best will do ...



Imagine if

- * You had a screen that was almost invisible to visitors until in use. When you finish viewing the trap door closes magically to hide the fabric.
- * If the motor and the structure was designed to be whisper quiet.
- * If the screen was able to drop down automatically when you turn on your projector.
- * If the fabric was one of the best in the business for 4K projection giving vibrant colour with a perfectly flat soft tensioned surface.
- * If the product had a 5 year comprehensive warranty.

Dreams are now reality!



Available for next day delivery
from many quality retailers and
distributors in UK and Ireland

www.Sapphireav.com

QR
Code



Quad's L-ite fantastic

Danny Phillips auditions a sub/sat array from Quad that promises a bigger performance than some of the competition – can it do justice to his beloved *Man of Steel* Blu-ray?



QUAD'S L-ITE PLUS 5.1 package offers slightly larger satellites than most compact systems, but without hogging space like bookshelf boxes. This system comes with four identical satellites – each measuring 248mm high – plus a centre speaker and active sub, packed into a single box. At £1,200, it will out-price budget buyers, but isn't prohibitively expensive either. All of the components are available separately should you wish to expand to 7.1 or downsize to 2.1.

Those who like a minimal frontage can keep the black cloth grilles of the satellites attached, which form a striking contrast with the white finish. Remove them and they reveal a 4in woven Kevlar midbass cone and 1in fabric dome tweeter, both fixed to a firm butyl rubber surround. It's all very easy on the eye.

The LF-66 subwoofer employs a 200W amplifier and two mechanically opposed 6in bass drivers, composite cones comprising one layer of woven carbon fibre sandwiched between two layers of glass fibre. Try asking for that in Subway.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
5.1-channel
speaker package

POSITION:
Part of Quad's
Performance range,
below Reference

PEERS:
Monitor Audio
Radius R90HT1;
Cambridge Audio
Aero 5.1

Superheroic sound

Hooked up to my AVR and fed *Man of Steel's* DTS-HD mix, the L-ite Plus system conjures up a big, beguiling soundstage peppered with lucid detail and

dynamically-steered effects. I was taken aback by the clarity of the sound and its immersive staging. With more cabinet capacity than your average compact speaker, the satellites dispatch action scenes with power and scale, while their accurate effect placement and wide dispersion put you at the heart of the action.

As Krypton is destroyed during the movie's entertaining first fifteen minutes, spaceships blow up chunks of the landscape with huge, bass-rich explosions, and as Jor-El's flying beast swoops down you can hear and feel it screeching and beating its wings above you.

But what makes L-ite Plus an especially likeable performer is its unflappable nature, particularly with the volume up high. As Superman and Zod wreak their brand of interplanetary havoc across Metropolis, midrange and high frequencies stay smooth and easy. Some listeners might crave a little more bite and aggression, but I was still easily seduced by their silky charms.

The subwoofer puts in a shift, melding well with the sats and reinforcing low frequencies with greater punch and depth than its size and driver array would suggest. There's a solidity and control that makes transient effects like footsteps and gunfire sound tight, nimble and – most importantly – realistic. Bigger, more expensive woofers deliver deeper thrills, of course, but it's certainly good for the price.

At the other end of the spectrum, high frequencies are crisp, airy and unflustered by rising volume.

If you want a 5.1 array with more clout than compacts, the L-ite Plus is worth an audition ■

SPECIFICATIONS

L-ITE PLUS

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 4in woven Kevlar cone; 1 x 1in fabric dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Two-way, sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 100Hz–20kHz
SENSITIVITY: 85dB
POWER HANDLING: 100W
DIMENSIONS: 141(w) x 248(h) x 184(d)mm
WEIGHT: 6.32kg

L-ITE PLUS CENTRE

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 4in woven Kevlar cones; 1 x 1in fabric dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Two-way, sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 100Hz–20kHz
SENSITIVITY: 86dB
POWER HANDLING: 100W
DIMENSIONS: 382(w) x 155(h) x 184(d)mm
WEIGHT: 5.56kg

LF-66 (SUBWOOFER)

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 6in long-throw drivers
ENCLOSURE: Sealed, opposing drivers
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 35Hz–120Hz
ON BOARD POWER: 200W
REMOTE CONTROL: No
DIMENSIONS: 237(w) x 308(h) x 241(d)mm
WEIGHT: 8.96kg
CONNECTIONS: Stereo phono in; LFE input

HCC VERDICT

Quad L-ite Plus 5.1

→ £1,200 Approx → www.quad-hifi.co.uk
→ Tel: 01480 452561

HIGHS: Elegant styling; solid build quality; potent, immersive sound with excellent dynamics and good scale; detail reproduction
LOWS: Safe sound lacks aggression; plenty of other rivals at this price point

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

SHOAH

AND 4 FILMS AFTER SHOAH BY CLAUDE LANZMANN

SHOAH • A VISITOR FROM THE LIVING
SOBIBÓR, OCTOBER 14, 1943, 4PM • THE KARSKI REPORT
THE LAST OF THE UNJUST

THE DEFINITIVE COLLECTION OF CLAUDE LANZMANN'S LIFE'S WORK FROM 1985 TO 2013:
THE MOST EPIC AND PROFOUND EXAMINATION OF THE HOLOCAUST EVER COMMITTED TO FILM.
ON BLU-RAY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE UK FROM JANUARY 2015



EUREKA!

The
Masters of Cinema
Series



/mastersofcinema
/eurekavideo

AVAILABLE FROM
amazon.co.uk

Affordable floorstanders

Ed Selley reviews a 5.1 array that will appeal to anyone with a tight budget and a penchant for largescale sonics – as long as they're not too style-conscious...



THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION of a brand is a curious thing. JBL is one of the most venerable outfits in the market and has an extensive range, including lush high-end models such as the Everest flagship. Yet in the UK it has a rather low profile, one that is largely influenced by its compact speakers and desktop audio biz.

This often means that the full-size speakers that JBL offers can sneak under the radar, which is a shame when the specifications of the Studio 2 series are considered. One of JBL's distinctive pieces of in-house technology – a 1in, horn-loaded tweeter derived from much more expensive models – lurks in every speaker. The benefits of mounting a tweeter in this way, says JBL, is improved dispersion and off-axis response over a dome design.

These tweeters are partnered with 'Poly Plas' (plastic) drivers and here, again, the JBLs are a distinctive design. The floorstanding Studio 270 makes use of a 6.5in unit, as is typical of a speaker at this price point, but partners it with a 4in midrange driver that makes

the 270 a genuine three-way offering.

Installation completed, the JBLs begin to show impressive attributes. With the same tweeter and 4in driver present across all five speakers, the integration between them is convincing. Those neat horn-loaded tweeters do indeed have excellent dispersion and this makes for a wide and even front soundstage. Furthermore, there is little sign of harshness or aggression, even with the output on my amp turned up high. The Studios power their way

through *Wreck-It Ralph* with a real sense of the layered and lavish soundstage that brings the movie's Sugar Rush scenes to life.

The decision to use this 4in midrange with the tweeter pays dividends in terms of detail and smoothness, because the JBLs are operating efficiently at a frequency point where many rivals are having to think about effecting a crossover. Coupled with the tweeter, the result is immersive dialogue and excellent fine detail retrieval. These are attributes equally useful to music listening, and in both stereo and 5.1 the JBLs are consistently capable.

The bass response of the Studio 270 is fairly deep but slightly soft and the SUB 250P seems to be similar. Yet the woofer isn't something you could accuse of being slow or bloated – whatever lack of absolute slam it might suffer from, it remains impressively controlled even when provoked.

The JBLs have a scale and presence that can elude speakers at this price, particularly smaller designs. The marvellously atmospheric score to *Rush* is handled with an assurance that is beyond many competitors and any broadcast TV that benefits from an expansive and detailed performance is treated to this in no uncertain terms. The Studios also manage to retain most of their talents at lower volumes, making them good everyday options ■

SPECIFICATIONS

STUDIO 270

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 6.5in Poly Plas bass driver; 1 x 4in Poly Plas mid-range driver; 1 x 1in horn-loaded HDI tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 45Hz-22kHz
SENSITIVITY: 88dB
POWER HANDLING: 200W
DIMENSIONS: 1,010(h) x 237(w) x 244(d)mm
WEIGHT: 16.1kg

STUDIO 220

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 4in Poly Plas mid/bass driver and 1 x 1in horn-loaded HDI tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 60Hz-22kHz
SENSITIVITY: 86dB
POWER HANDLING: 120W
DIMENSIONS: 260(h) x 237(w) x 180(d)mm
WEIGHT: 3.7kg

STUDIO 225C

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 4in Poly Plas mid/bass drivers; 1 x 1in horn-loaded HDI tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 60Hz-22kHz
SENSITIVITY: 88dB
POWER HANDLING: 120W
DIMENSIONS: 165(h) x 535(w) x 187(d)mm
WEIGHT: 7.9kg

SUB 250P (SUBWOOFER)

DRIVE UNITS: 10in Poly Plas woofer
ENCLOSURE: Ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 32-150Hz
ON BOARD POWER: 200W
REMOTE CONTROL: No
DIMENSIONS: 419(h) x 341(w) x 389(d)mm
WEIGHT: 15kg
CONNECTIONS: Left and right line-level input

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Affordable 5.1 speaker array

POSITION: JBL's entry-level floorstander speaker range

PEERS: Wharfedale Diamond 100 HCP; Tannoy Mercury Vi

HCC VERDICT

JBL Studio 2 series 5.1

→ £1,070 Approx → <http://uk.jbl.com>
 → 01707 278113

HIGHS: Clear, open and expressive performance; unfussy placement and solid build
LOWS: Decidedly functional appearance; slight lack of low-end impact

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Smallscale cinema delights

There are plenty of ultra-affordable AV receivers on the market – but what speakers should you partner them with? **Adrian Justins** reckons Tannoy's budget sub/sat package is a good option



IF YOU'RE LOOKING for a no-nonsense, 5.1 speaker package for around £500 (or even less if you shop around) then the Tannoy HTS-101 has to be on your radar.

The sharp-edged satellites may be lacking in design flair, but are noteworthy for their hefty construction, being fashioned from high-density wood and coated in more lacquer than Clark Gable's barnet in *Gone With The Wind*. With rubber feet, each one can be shelf-mounted. Alternatively, supplied brackets enable them to be fixed to a wall, and considering their small size this may be a good option for many.

Each cabinet sports robust binding posts, while the front grilles can be prised off to reveal the drivers – a 0.75in tweeter and 3in midbass on all but the centre channel, which has an additional midbass unit. The aesthetically matched sub features a downward-firing 8in woofer, tickled by a 100W amp. Not the most exciting of specs, but you get what you pay for.

Like a pre-season Lewis Hamilton these drivers need a good few hours behind the wheel before they get in to their stride but

once they're up and running their performance is exceptionally good. High-resolution Blu-ray soundtracks are the perfect fodder for the HTS-101, which delivers an incredibly involving sound for the money. They are impressive at finding the subtle

details that can disappear with inferior speakers – during the first cave scene in *Prometheus* (DTS-HD MA) the sound of water gently trickling down the sides can be clearly heard from behind. Later, incidental sounds, such as the mapping droids and buzzing of electronic instruments on the ship's deck, are conveyed with real clarity from the satellite array. There's so much going on aurally, including the orchestrated score, but the HTS-101 deftly produces the sonic goods.

To give the system – especially the subwoofer – a real run for its money, I reverted to *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* on BD and the woodland firefight scene. Here, bullets slice through the air, brilliantly passing across the soundstage. Despite the cacophony, the sound of trees shattering emerges with force from the rears, as does the debris falling upon Holmes. When the big gun ('Little Hansel') grinds into action it doesn't sound overly harsh and metallic. Upon firing, the subwoofer beefs up the blast with rich bass notes, without totally matching the onscreen destruction in terms of scale or depth.

Energetic performer

Overall, the Tannoy HTS-101 doesn't have enough might for larger rooms but for a small-to-medium setup where funds are limited it does a terrific job. It's a wonderfully energetic performer, without colouration or tonal distortion. When watching TV, dialogue in particular is much more resonant and authoritative than you can get out of any built-in speakers. The woofer is a bit of a beast, physically, but space-conscious buyers can get this array as a 5.0 and use a more compact sub if they really wish ■

SPECIFICATIONS

HTS SATELLITE

DRIVE UNITS: 0.75in titanium WideBand dome tweeter; 3in midbass paper cone driver
ENCLOSURE: Sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 100Hz-40kHz
SENSITIVITY: 87dB
POWER HANDLING: 25-100W
DIMENSIONS: 106(w) x 160(h) x 142(d)mm
WEIGHT: 1.4kg

HTS CENTRE

DRIVE UNITS: 0.75in titanium WideBand dome tweeter; 2 x 3in midbass paper cone drivers
ENCLOSURE: Sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 100Hz-40kHz
SENSITIVITY: 87dB
POWER HANDLING: 25-100W
DIMENSIONS: 250(w) x 106(h) x 166(d)mm
WEIGHT: 2.3kg

HTS SUB

DRIVE UNITS: 8in long-throw, downward-firing paper cone bass driver
ENCLOSURE: Ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 29Hz-200Hz
ON BOARD POWER: 100W
REMOTE CONTROL: No
DIMENSIONS: 275(w) x 420(h) x 370(d)mm
WEIGHT: 10kg
CONNECTIONS: LFE input; speaker-level inputs

HCC VERDICT

Tannoy HTS-101

→ £500 Approx → www.tannoy.com

→ Tel: 01236 420199

HIGHS: Rigid construction; excellent clarity; easy to setup and install

LOWS: Looks like something out of the 1980s; not so thrilling with music

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Affordable 5.1
sub/sat system

POSITION:
Tannoy's budget
multichannel
offering

PEERS:
JBL Cinema 510;
KEF KHT-1505

Into the valley of AV...

...rode B&W's 600 Series. **Adam Rayner** auditions the 5.1 683 Theatre package and finds its mid-range price point hides some high-end traits



THE 600 SERIES has been part of B&W's speaker lineup for many years now, offering movie fans a first step on the brand's floorstanding ladder. In that regard it could be classed as 'entry-level', if it wasn't for both the price demanded and the technology used. And now it's been 'radically revamped,' with six new speaker models sporting improved designs and driver wizardry.

This £2,750 package uses the 683 floorstanders for L/R duties, the 686 bookshelves for surrounds and the HTM61 centre speaker. The ASW610XP woofer has been carried over from before, but carries an updated finish.

By way of apology for the rudimentary styling, the 600 Series drivers are a synergy of cunning. The performance that the 683 Theatre set offers – I'll tell you now that it's as astonishing to hear as it is unremarkable to look at – is a clear product of B&W's engineering nous.

You get a Kevlar midband in every speaker, plus LF units in the centre and towers made from dual-layer aluminium, for a high level of rigidity and real piston action. The tweeters feature Nautilus tube rear-chamber loading, and introduce B&W's Decoupled Double Dome design, where one aluminium dome is mounted to the other, with the whole assembly then suspended (decoupled) by a cushioning gel ring. The result is the fastest, sweetest, highest-reaching, lowest-distorting tweeter I've heard for a sensible price.

Immediately impressive

The very moment you fire these up you can appreciate

the speed and class of their driver complements. The opening multichannel choral score of *Frozen* (BD) was just delicious. Every voice all around me was distinct yet characterful – the timbre oh-so so real. The tinkliest crystalline sounds of magically-forming ice, and the soaring power of Idina Menzel's voice, were searing yet pure.

The midband from those distinctive yellow Kevlar drivers offers potent snap, as evidenced when Olaf the snowman belly-surfs down the mountain, yelling manically. His voice flies around the soundstage at speed as the camera follows his progress, with the B&W system showing smooth, seamless pans.

Furthermore, this package can go from conversational to really, frighteningly loud without sounding strained, all the while aided by the ferocious ASW610XP sub.

And with *Wall-E*'s lonely Earth sequences, the sense of space and remote desolation created by the 683 Theatre takes a huge amount of quality, separating it from true entry-level systems. The sheer size of the echoes through these tweeters and lightning-fast drivers is goosebump-raising.

This system is therefore absurd value for money. Yes, it's a bit bland to look at, but it sounds superb. No buyer will be disappointed ■

SPECIFICATIONS

683

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in Decoupled Double Dome aluminium tweeter; 1 x 6in woven Kevlar FST midrange; 2 x 6.5in aluminium cone bass drivers

ENCLOSURE: Three-way, front-ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 52Hz-22kHz

SENSITIVITY: 89dB

POWER HANDLING: 200W

DIMENSIONS: 190(w) x 985(h) x 364(d)mm
WEIGHT: 27.2kg

HTM61

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in Decoupled Double Dome aluminium tweeter; 1 x 4in woven Kevlar midrange; 2 x 6.5in aluminium cone bass drivers

ENCLOSURE: Three-way, rear ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 50Hz-22kHz

SENSITIVITY: 88dB

POWER HANDLING: 150W

DIMENSIONS: 590(w) x 218(h) x 304(d)mm
WEIGHT: 17.2kg

686

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 1in Decoupled Double Dome aluminium tweeter; 1 x 5in woven Kevlar midband/bass driver

ENCLOSURE: Two-way, front-ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 62Hz-22kHz

SENSITIVITY: 85dB

POWER HANDLING: 100W

DIMENSIONS: 160(w) x 315(h) x 229(d)mm
WEIGHT: 4.6kg

ASW610XP (SUBWOOFER)

DRIVE UNITS: 10in paper pulp/Kevlar driver
ENCLOSURE: Sealed, forward-firing

FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 25Hz-140Hz

ON BOARD POWER: 500W

REMOTE CONTROL: No

DIMENSIONS: 325(w) x 325(h) x 375(d)mm
WEIGHT: 34.5kg

CONNECTIONS: Stereo phono inputs; stereo speaker-level inputs

HCC VERDICT

Bowers & Wilkins 683 Theatre

→ £2,750 Approx → www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk

→ 0800 232 1513

HIGHS: Solid build; fast, fluid multichannel performance with dynamism and bass weight
LOWS: Not the most luxurious-looking cabinets; large centre enclosure

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Mid-price 5.1 floorstanding speaker array

POSITION: B&W's entry-level floorstanding setup

PEERS: KEF R Series R100 5.1; Monitor Audio Silver 6AV12

★ THE UK'S PREMIER ★ CULT CLASSIC FILM LABEL

theguardian

LABEL OF THE YEAR
2011 & 2013



2013

l'immagine
ritrovata
film restoration
& conservation

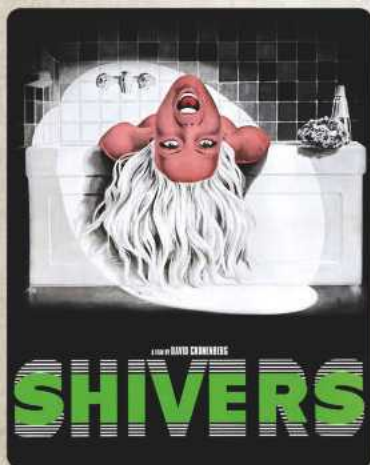
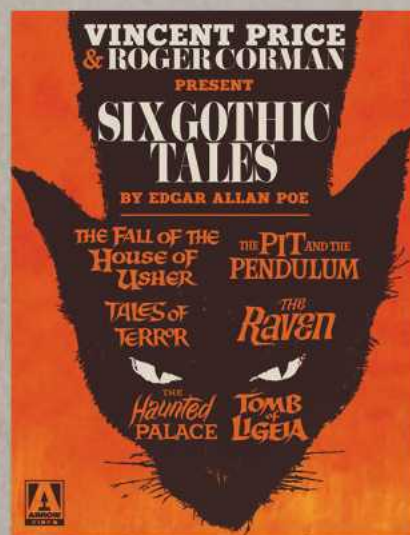
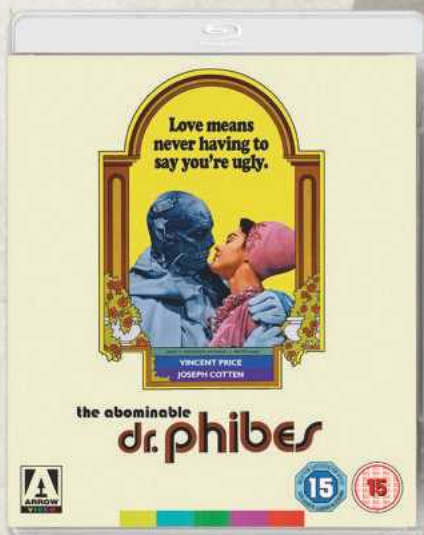
2014

BLOODY
DISGUSTING

2013

HOME CINEMA
Choice

LABEL OF THE YEAR • BEST EXTRA
BEST REMASTER • BEST PACKAGING
2010 & 2013



FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION ON FORTHCOMING RELEASES VISIT:



Hoping to Excite again

Danny Phillips runs the rule over Dynaudio's revamped Excite multichannel array and wonders if its classy construction is matched by sophisticated sonics

THE NEW LINE

of Dynaudio's Excite range comprises four models – the X34 and top-end X38 floorstanders (£2,000 and £2,850 per pair respectively), the £620 X24 centre and the compact X14 bookshelf (£900 per pair). We're using a pair of X34s, a pair of X14s and the X24, plus the £1,550 Sub 600 woofer.

The X34 is a handsome if unremarkable floorstander. Dynaudio hasn't tried anything clever or look-at-me with the cabinet, sticking with a classic box shape. Unsurprisingly at this price, it offers bespoke technologies. The driver array comprises two Magnesium Silicate Polymer mid/bass cones with lightweight aluminium wire voice coils, above which sits a fabric dome tweeter. Identical driver technology is employed in the X24 centre, except the dual mid/bass cones flank the tweeter in the horizontally aligned cabinet.

The X14 is the most compact Excite speaker yet. Basically a mini-me version of the X34, it's designed to sit on a tabletop or optional stand.

Rounding off the system is the Sub 600, which offers a decent spec and similarly smart design. It also doffs a hat to stereo setups where processor-based bass management will not be an option by offering a full



bandwidth input and a high-pass filter to cut off low frequencies at 60Hz or 80Hz, before passing the audio signal on via its 'SAT' speaker output.

After rigging up the Excite system it does indeed deliver impressive results. This is a refined, effortless listen, taking soundmixes

like *The Desolation of Smaug* in its stride. Its sound is fast and detailed with a crisp leading edge, and it musters a big soundstage when the material demands it.

My favourite 'Orc Attack' chapter is the perfect showcase for the system's talents. Gentle footsteps are audible thanks to the speakers' terrific detail and sensitivity, while Bolg's subtle growl is similarly lucid. When the attack begins, the 'thunk' of feet landing on wooden floors sounds solid and realistic. Every effect is delivered with clarity and conviction, from creaking floorboards to snarling beasts, and underpinned forcefully by the 12in sub.

Switch to a bigger scene and Excite's sense of scale makes it easy to suspend disbelief. As Smaug stomps around the caverns of Erebor you'll really feel his size and heft, thanks to the subwoofer's convincing treatment of his footsteps and bellowing roar.

Surround presentation is also impressive – effects from the X14 surrounds are clean and precise, and the echoes that ring out around the hall create an amazing sense of space and distance. As the dragon passes while the dwarves cross the bridge, the swooshing noise and its throaty gurgle sweep between channels with a smooth, consistent tone.

However, I do feel this Excite system needs to offer more attack. Even with my eager-sounding Onkyo receiver it's a tad reserved. Is its sound more suited to music? I dusted off a 48kHz/24-bit DVD-Audio disc of a terrific Japanese jazz album called *Variations* by Atagiin, skipped to the stunning 5.1 mix of *What The World Needs Now Is Love* and luxuriated in this system's expressive presentation and confident staging. The sax and oboe solos are cleanly separated and precisely located, placing me right in the middle of the performance.

This 5.1 array is a sparkling performer, then, but its price point may put some off ■

SPECIFICATIONS

EXCITE X34

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 5in MSP mid/bass drivers; 1 x 1in coated fabric dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Bass reflex
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 37Hz-23kHz
SENSITIVITY: 86dB
POWER HANDLING: 200W
DIMENSIONS: 170(w) x 929(h) x 270(d)mm
WEIGHT: 17kg

EXCITE X24

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 4in MSP mid/bass drivers; 1 x 1in coated fabric dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Bass reflex
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 55Hz-23kHz
SENSITIVITY: 84dB
POWER HANDLING: 150W
DIMENSIONS: 500(w) x 145(h) x 210(d)mm
WEIGHT: 8kg

EXCITE X14

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 5in MSP mid/bass driver; 1 x 1in coated fabric dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Bass reflex
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 50Hz-23kHz
SENSITIVITY: 85dB
POWER HANDLING: 150W
DIMENSIONS: 170(w) x 285(h) x 255(d)mm
WEIGHT: 6.5kg

SUB 600 (SUBWOOFER)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 12in woofer
ENCLOSURE: Sealed cabinet
LOW FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 22Hz-200Hz
ON BOARD POWER: 300W
REMOTE CONTROL: No
DIMENSIONS: 350(w) x 370(h) x 420(d)mm
WEIGHT: 21kg
CONNECTIONS: Stereo phono input and output; LFE input and output

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 5.1-channel speaker package

POSITION: A step up from the entry-level DM series, but below the Focus

PEERS: Quadral Signo Avantgarde 5.1; Tannoy Precision 5.1

HCC VERDICT

Dynaudio Excite

→ £5,000 Approx → www.dynaudio.com
 → 01353 721089

HIGHS: Excellent build quality; polished sound with crisp detail; deep, seamlessly integrated bass; impressive scale and speed
LOWS: Could be a little more attacking; more affordable rivals also impress

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Cue the music...



Q Acoustics.

Media 4 The real hi-fi soundbar



Sonic wizardry for music and movies

With its 100w amplifier and built-in subwoofer, the Media 4 plays music, TV sound and movies with astonishing quality - no extra boxes required!

Simply plug and play - plus wirelessly connect smartphones, tablets and laptops using aptX Bluetooth.

Wall mounts with built-in bracket or shelf-mount with supplied anti-vibration feet.

www.Qacoustics.co.uk



What Hi-Fi? Awards 2014,
'Product of the Year'



Trusted Reviews 'Recommended',
October 2014



AV Forums 'Highly Recommended',
July 2014



Home Cinema Choice 'Best Buy',
July 2014



So, who needs 4K anyway?

John Archer looks past the JVC DLA-X700R's 'is it 4K or isn't it?' confusion and discovers a true movie star fit for a dedicated home theatre

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Full HD D-ILA PJ
with 3D playback
and e-Shift 4K

POSITION:
Between the X500R
and the X900R

PEERS:
JVC DLA-X500R;
Sony VPL-
VW500ES

IT WOULD BE easy to be cynical about JVC's DLA-X700R. After all, a projector that claims a 3,840 x 2,160 resolution and which can take in native 4K source images yet isn't actually a 4K projector could be seen to be deliberately exploiting the confusions littering the nascent 4K marketplace.

It doesn't help, either, that the X700R's £7,300 asking price positions it perilously closely to genuine, 4K-in-4K-out PJs from Sony – including the brilliant £8,000 VPL-VW500ES and the recently launched £5,000 VPL-VW300ES. However, after spending two weeks with the X700R the only thing I care about is stopping JVC from ever having it back...

D-ILA déjà vu

The X700R looks exactly like the last line of JVC D-ILA projectors: a squat, fairly unglamorous black rectangle with a large

lens in the centre of the front edge and venting ports down either side. And, as last year's models looked near identical to their predecessors, I can only assume the JVC staffer in charge of product styling is taking the world's longest holiday.

Emblazoned on the top are THX and ISF logos. The first signifies that the projector has passed the performance tests of the THX quality assurance group, while the latter indicates that the X700R carries enough calibration flexibility to support a pro installation by a trained ISF engineer.

In the X700R's case, the calibration suite is exceptional, including a startlingly fulsome colour management system; gamma management; 10 'lens memory' slots for storing zoom and focus settings for different movie aspect ratios; white balance management; and welcome control over JVC's e-Shift 4K system.



Another well-designed
backlit zapper from JVC

Ah yes, e-Shift 4K. This is the X700R's '4K' technology, putting two HD chipsets in line with one offset diagonally by half a pixel so that the image passed through them ends up being made from four times as many pixels. The X700R can also take in native 4K source feeds (up to 60p at 4:2:0 colour resolution). But here's the kicker: the projector has to downscale native 4K feeds to HD before passing them through the e-Shift 4K optics. So what you ultimately get out of the X700R is a native HD image with UHD pixel density.

Such density is certainly useful with the really large images you can get from a projector, as it should help them look brighter and smoother, and less prone to jagged edges. But it's not genuine 4K.

Upping the contrast ante

If you read our review earlier this year of JVC's X500R (HCC #232), you might be wondering why it's worth finding £2,300 more for this model. But there are some key differences.

'The X700R's pictures do look sharper – or at least denser – than they would on a normal HD projector'

The X700R offers much more comprehensive installation options, doubles the number of lens memory slots, and – most significantly – offers double the contrast tech.

In fact, the X700R's simply jaw-dropping 120,000:1 native contrast – as in, not dependent on a dynamic contrast system – has much more to do with why I love it than any e-Shift 4K shenanigans. And this contrast ratio rises to a claimed 1,200,000:1 if you activate JVC's new Intelligent Lens Aperture dynamic contrast feature.

The fact is, though, that the X700R doesn't need any help from a dynamic aperture. In fact, all this did while watching the many night scenes in the engagingly rubbish *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* was add some unwelcome brightness instability in return for only a tiny bit more image dynamism. Turn it off and you've still got quite the best black levels I've ever seen on any projector.

Even the darkest vampire-hiding corner is delivered without any of the tell-tale greyish pall that characterises low-contrast displays. Yet within the very same frame you'll see lamps and moons and other bright elements looking gorgeously light and punchy. There's no sense of bright elements being muted during dark scenes, something which is always a concern with rival video-chuckers that depend on dynamic apertures.

Also exhilarating is the amount of shadow detail the X700R retains during murkier moments, ensuring that they are conveyed just as deep and detailed as bright ones. This makes for a fantastically immersive viewing experience.

The X700R only claims 1,300 Lumens of brightness, a figure that's hardly likely to impress specifications freaks, and one that makes it not an ideal partner for a well-lit environment. Yet its classy contrast talent means that images still appear bright and vibrant, and its beautifully inky black colours provide an excellent foundation for the rest of the colour palette. *Abraham Lincoln...*'s daytime scenes are replete with believable colour tones, and these lose zero punch or naturalism in dimly-lit interiors; the projector perfectly handles the differences between the human and vampire skin tones during the train attack.

A side-by-side run-through of some 4K demo footage did confirm that the X700R's e-Shift 4K system is no match for the spectacular resolution of Sony's true 4K VPL-VW500ES. But the X700R's pictures do look sharper – or at least denser – than they would on a normal HD projector, removing any jaggedness around the often stark outlines of the characters against the muted backdrops throughout my Presidential undead-slaying reference Blu-ray. The extra pixel density additionally creates a more 'analogue' feeling to the image than normal HD projectors, leaving you feeling like you're watching celluloid rather than, well... a bunch of pixels.

There's a small loss of detail over Abe's arms as he swings his axe around, as well as over other areas of rapid motion. But this isn't a big enough deal to justify activating the projector's rather over-eager Clear Motion processing system.

Last year's JVC projector models all struggled with the third dimension. However, the company has introduced a new 3D driving system this year that, as far as I can see, completely removes crosstalk from the X700R's 3D efforts. This leaves the pristine 3D Blu-ray of *Oz The Great and Powerful* looking detailed, dense, realistic and full of depth. There's not much reduction in colour vibrancy and brightness during 3D either, despite the dimming effect of the shuttering glasses.

More than a matter of pixels

When I started using the DLA-X700R I expected it to struggle against Sony's VPL-VW500ES native 4K projector. Yet while it doesn't deliver a true 4K detail experience like the Sony, its superiority in the contrast and black level departments means that some movie fans will feel it ultimately delivers the more cinematic image. In that regard it's ever so easy to recommend, especially with JVC still tight-lipped when it comes to any new 4K hardware ■

SPECIFICATIONS

4K: No. 1,920 x 1,080, but with e-Shift 4K
CONNECTIONS: 2 x HDMI inputs; RS-232 port for provided 3D sync dongle; 12V trigger; Ethernet port
BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): 1,300 Lumens
CONTRAST (CLAIMED): 120,000:1 native; 1,200,000:1 dynamic
DIMENSIONS: 455(w) x 179(h) x 472(d)mm
WEIGHT: 15kg
FEATURES: e-Shift 4K; new 3D driving technology; 2D-3D conversion; colour management; gamma management; Intelligent Lens Aperture; automatic lens cover; vertical digital keystone correction; Clear Black mode; 10 lens memories; Clear Motion Drive; THX and ISF certification; 21dB running noise in low-lamp mode; 4K signal input

HCC VERDICT



JVC DLA-X700R

→ £7,300 approx → www.jvc.co.uk
 → Tel: 0845 310 8000

HIGHS: Probably the best black levels available at a vaguely sensible price; gorgeously sharp, natural images; runs quietly; calibration chops
LOWS: Minor motion resolution loss; it's not truly 4K; it's not cheap either; cumbersome chassis

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Vibrant cinema star

Epson's latest mid-range home theatre projector comes equipped for every eventuality.

Steve May eats popcorn, goes wireless



EPSON MAKES MUCH of the colour output of its 3LCD projection fleet, and often with good reason – most cast images which glow with *Candy Crush* allure. The EH-TW6600W (Active 3D) is a fine example, creating images that compete with LED TVs in terms of kaleidoscopic vibrancy. With this PJ, superheroes appear more heroic and animations more animated.

The unit ships with Epson's HDMI switcher/transmitter. It has five inputs for all your sources, and, as well as its wireless output, another one for a local display device. Audio from a transmitted source is routed through to the projector's speakers. Full HD image quality is seemingly undiminished by its journey through the ether.

Epson rates its contrast at 70,000:1. The projector handles dark scenes and gradations well, although it never quite goes ultra black. This doesn't diminish the power of its

dynamics though, or the level of shadow detail available. When Longshot emerges from the swamp early into *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, every rivet and panel of his dark armour is clearly delineated. The moody battle gear of the mercenary

Cemetery Wind squad is similarly defined. The projector's Auto Iris can aid black level performance, but while the effects are subtle enough to negate any visual pumping, I found its scratchy adjustment an audible irritant and eventually turned it off.

The PJ itself is fashionably curvaceous, with a white gloss finish. Unusually, the EH-TW6600W features an integrated 2 x 10W sound system. Typically these are the provision of sub-£1K projectors. Out of the box, I found the audio level high and even though nothing was connected the speakers were making an unpleasant whistling noise; I had to knock the volume back to zero to cure it.

For my evaluation, I ceiling-mounted the unit, using the standard rear-plate fixing points. From a distance of just over 4m I could comfortably fill a 110in screen. Focus and zoom are manually adjusted.

There's a wide variety of picture presets available, including Living Room, Natural, Cinema and Dynamic. The latter is like being squirted in the eyes with lemon juice. The best option, both in terms of tonal balance and overall usability, is Cinema. In this mode the projector defaults to its Eco lamp setting which significantly reduces fan noise.

There's a variety of calibration options offered, not all intuitive. Super White actually proves duller than the default. The Super Resolution and Detail Enhancement modes don't penalize and so are worth experimenting with. The former adds a level of edge

emphasis while Detail Enhancement draws out texture. Yet the newly-remastered *Re-Animator* Blu-ray proves a challenge for the EH-TW6600W's picture processing. The disc features a high level of pixel noise, which Super Resolution exaggerates. It transpires that what works well for *Transformers: Age of Extinction* isn't right for budget schlockers...

Be careful with the presets and processing modes, however, and the EH-TW6600W is a thoroughly entertaining cinema projector ■

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active

4K: No. 1,920 x 1,080

CONNECTIONS: 2 x HDMI inputs; PC VGA input; component video input; composite video input; stereo audio input; 12V trigger, RS232 control port; USB

BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): 2,500 Lumens

CONTRAST (CLAIMED): 70,000:1

DIMENSIONS: 410(w) x 304(h) x 157(d)mm

WEIGHT: 6.8kg

FEATURES: 3LCD projector (0.61in C2 Fine panels); built-in 2 x 10W audio; 250W lamp; 5,000-hour claimed lamp life in Eco mode, 3,500 hours otherwise; 36dB fan noise/23dB in Eco mode; 1.32-2.15:1 throw ratio; 1.6x zoom; vertical (+/- 60%) and horizontal (+/- 24%) lens shift; vertical and horizontal keystone correction; WiHD wireless HDMI switcher/transmitter; Auto, Dynamic, Living room, Natural, and Cinema modes (2D); Dynamic and Cinema modes (3D); Super Resolution and Detail Enhancement modes

HCC VERDICT

Epson EH-TW6600W

→ £1,700 Approx → www.epson.co.uk

→ Tel: 01952 607 111

HIGHS: Colour-rich and dynamic images; effective wireless HDMI transmitter/switcher; low-crosstalk 3D performance; decent zoom and lens shift options

LOWS: Not the quietest projector around; scratchy Auto Iris; limited motion resolution

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Full HD 3D LCD projector

POSITION: Upper mid-range model, below the EH-TW9200W

PEERS: Sony VPL-HW40ES; Optoma HD50

HOME CINEMA



DESIGN SERVICE

- Award Winning Designer
- Room Design
- Acoustic Design



PRODUCT SUPPLY

- Projectors and Screens
- Audio Visual Equipment
- Control Systems



INSTALLATION

- Experienced Technicians
- Calibration





BenQ plays the iteration game

The projector brand's re-imagining of last year's W1070 model is hardly revolutionary, but, believes [John Archer](#), it's still outrageously good value

AV INFO

PRODUCT:

Affordable single-chip DLP PJ with Full HD and 3D playback support

POSITION:

Towards the lower end of BenQ's home entertainment projector range

PEERS:

Optoma HD50; BenQ W1080ST

AS ITS NAME makes no attempt to hide, the BenQ W1070+ projector only improves a little on the original, widely-admired W1070. Not enough, certainly, to justify being given a whole new model number. But with a price tag of only £650, any improvement at all has the potential to make the W1070+ a bargain of insane proportions.

Despite costing so little, the W1070+ delivers a Full HD resolution from its DLP engine; a promising claimed contrast ratio of 10,000:1; and a high brightness of 2,200 Lumens. It's also been tuned expressly for home cinema use, too, rather than being a re-purposed data projector.

Angling for acceptance

The W1070+ is pretty enough to sit happily in a living room environment. Its mainly gloss-white finish rests attractively alongside metallic grey highlights around the lens barrel, and there are enough artful curves and angles

in the sculpting to make it look as if someone actually cared how the W1070+ looked.

While taking in the W1070+'s design, I was pleased to find a vertical image shifting system under a slide-back panel. This welcome setup aid is often ignored on projectors under £1,000. With two HDMI inputs, an RS-232 system integration port and a 12V trigger output, the PJ's connections are decent, too.

There are some hookups that mark the W1070+ out from the original W1070: MHL mobile phone playback via an optional dongle and a new wireless HD video transmission system. This latter feature is optional (£250 as a standalone add-on, or buyable with the projector for £800 all-in). You attach the transmitter to your video source and the receiver to the projector, so you can send your video wirelessly as far as 30 metres, rather than having to cable around your room.

Another difference on the W1070+'s specifications sheet is its 2,200 Lumens versus



The W1070+ offers an on-body 1.3x zoom and vertical lens shift

the W1070's 2,000 Lumens. This extra luminance aims to boost both colour response and shadow detailing.

An intriguing new feature for the W1070+ is a built-in 10W 'resonant chamber' speaker array. This works remarkably well, delivering a wide, clean, surprisingly dynamic soundfield that's tolerable to listen to. Dare I say it, it's pretty much a first for the PJ audio world.

Of the features the W1070+ shares with its predecessor, a highlight is the wealth of picture

'BenQ continues to reign supreme when it comes to bigscreen home entertainment on the cheap'

calibration tools. These include colour and gamma management and help the unit secure the endorsement of the Imaging Science Foundation (ISF).

The W1070+ supports 3D playback, but you don't get any of BenQ's Active shutter 3D glasses included for free.

Sharp-shooter

This mid-sized living room light-cannon is a remarkably accomplished performer for its money. HD sources (which is what your bigscreen diet should solely consist of these days) look razor-sharp; the stunning levels of detail in my much-loved *Pacific Rim* Blu-ray are rendered beautifully. The projector easily picks out such image minutiae as the weathered look to Becket's aging Jaeger war machine. The image doesn't suffer with stressy edges or excessive grain or dot crawl either, showing the sharpness is natural rather than forced by processing.

Another potent element of the W1070+'s images is its colour response. *Pacific Rim*'s

lurid colour palette is done full justice, even during scenes, such as the opening Kaiju battle, that feature hyper-colourful graphical interfaces. There's a pop and impact here, compared to the dullness I've witnessed on budget projectors. In fact this is one area where the W1070+ out-performs the first W1070, with its improved brightness giving colours a little extra punch.

Subtle, shadowy detailing in *Pacific Rim*'s darker scenes, such as those lensed within the Jaeger interiors, is conveyed with aplomb. The W1070+'s extra brightness achieves this without compromising the projector's black response which, while actually the weakest element of the W1070+'s picture make-up, is still convincing considering the price point.

The W1070+'s clarity remains almost completely intact when there's lots of motion in the frame – a familiar strength of DLP technology, especially when, as here, the six-speed/six-segment colour wheel arrangement is good enough to stop moving skin tones looking fizzy.

You can get deeper black levels and more nuanced colours if you spend quite a chunk more on a projector. And occasionally I noticed traces of the so-called DLP rainbow effect, where stripes of pure red, green and blue flit into view over stand-out bright parts of the picture. Some are more susceptible than others to this, so you should probably grab a demo if you can.

The BenQ is less successful in 3D mode. Here, the image becomes bizarrely infused with red. This isn't too noticeable during bright footage, but during the night-time Kaiju battles the sky was endowed with a distracting scarlet tinge. It's unfortunate, because elsewhere the W1070+ is a credible 3D machine, delivering plenty of detail, colour richness and brightness.

A final point to add: the wireless HD transmitter, if you opt to get it, works flawlessly in 2D and 3D mode, adding no interference or extra image delay (I consistently measured input lag at an impressively low, gaming-friendly 34ms).

Object of desire

Basically, I'm in love with the W1070+. The improvements engineered over the already brilliant-value W1070 may be slight but they're all worthwhile, ensuring that BenQ continues to reign supreme when it comes to delivering genuine bigscreen thrills on the cheap ■

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active (but glasses are optional)

4K: No. 1,920 x 1,080

CONNECTIONS: 2 x HDMI inputs; component video input; D-Sub PC port; MHL input; mini-jack audio input; composite video input; USB for power supply; RS-232C; 12V trigger output

BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): 2,200 ANSI Lumens

CONTRAST (CLAIMED): 10,000:1

DIMENSIONS: 312(w) x 104(h) x 244(d)mm

WEIGHT: 2.75kg

FEATURES: Single-chip DLP projector; 6-speed/6-segment colour wheel; Brilliant Colour processing; ISF certified; 1.15-1.5 throw ratio; 40in-235in image; 1.3x optical zoom; claimed lamp-life of 6,000 hours in SmartEco mode; vertical lens shift; vertical and horizontal keystone adjustment; 28dB fan noise; optional wireless HD transmission system



HCC VERDICT



BenQ W1070+

→ £650 Approx → www.benq.co.uk

→ Tel: 0906 753 3443

HIGHS: Stunning value; good 2D pictures for the money; cute design; plenty of setup tools

LOWS: Curious red tinge to 3D; black levels only so-so; occasional traces of rainbow effect

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Never has **top quality** home cinema seating been **so affordable**



FrontRow™ Classic Seating from £685.00

- Modular design for curved and straight seating configurations
- Large Range of Fabrics and Leather options
- Black leather available from stock
- Optional drinks trays and cup holders

NEW!

FrontRow™ Modern Seating

- Straight and corner configurations
- Full Leather or Fabric
- Large selection of colours
- Two tone colour options
- Manual or electric recliners
- Adjustable headrests
- Prices from £510.00



All **FrontRow™** seating include a space-maximising inclining mechanism that allows seating to be placed close to a wall and include a comprehensive 5 year warranty including accidental damage. A free design service is available to ensure the seating configuration is suitable for your room.

For further information please call: 01892 552561 or visit www.frontrow-seating.co.uk

FrontRow™ Home Cinema Seating, 69 London Road, Southborough, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 0PA

Breaking the price barrier

Despite some weaknesses, Sony's new sub-£2,000 home cinema projector is worthy of your consideration. **John Archer** gets his lens shift on



SONY'S VPL-HW40ES ADDS a new entry-level option to the company's projector range, putting its SXRD technology within the grasp of more people thanks to a £1,850 price tag. And there's little sign from the outside that it's nearly a grand cheaper than its HW55ES sibling. It's identical in design, sporting the same large footprint, vaguely elliptical chassis and large, centralised lens.

Above the lens are horizontal and vertical image shift wheels. The mechanisms aren't especially precise, meaning you have to do a little work to get the image in exactly the right spot, but it's the range of movement (an impressive $\pm 71\%$) that really matters. There's plenty of zoom (1.6x) at your disposal, too.

Connections include twin HDMI inputs – you can add a wireless HDMI system in the shape of the optional IFU-WH1 add-on. A disappointment is that there's no 12V trigger

output. There are more affordable projectors from rival brands that provide this system-simplifying hookup.

At the heart of the Sony can be found a trio of proprietary SXRD imaging chips, delivering a native Full HD resolution and, in this case, a claimed brightness

output of 1,700 Lumens. There's no claimed contrast ratio for the VPL-HW40ES, however, and it relies on a dynamic system to deliver its maximum contrast performance, meaning you certainly won't always – or even often – see a full 1,700 Lumens coming out of the lens.

Settling down to watch a few movies on the VPL-HW40ES reveals that it's a chip off the Sony PJ block, proving again that SXRD technology has cinematic chops even at the relatively low end of the market.

Pictures are superbly crisp. The astonishing detailing visible on the *Captain Phillips* Blu-ray (derived from a 4K native master) is done full justice, with edges so sharp they could cut glass. There's a touch of noise associated with this sharpness if you use Sony's Reality Creation feature, but personally I found its benefits outweighed this small negative, so I left it on, but with the resolution element of the processing set low. And that slight noise issue is reduced if you run the PJ with its lamp set to low rather than its default. This is something I'd suggest, as it gives you the lowest running noise and the best black levels.

Colour performance is great for the money, delivering a range and subtlety of tone that works well with both the below-decks sequences in *Captain Phillips* and the vibrant 'happy ending' sequence in *Frozen*. Motion is good, too. There's little judder with either 2D or 3D footage, and nor is there any significant sign of resolution loss over moving objects, even during camera pans.

Rounding out an excellent image for £1,850 is a well-judged balance between contrast and brightness. Bright parts of dark images look punchy and bold, yet sequences like those in the alien structure in Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* appear reasonably convincingly black (but not as true as on the higher-priced VPL-HW55ES) and, most important of all, stuffed with shadow detail and greyscale subtleties.

Overall, you should be left in no doubt that the VPL-HW40ES is another great product from Sony's projector team. It's not perfect (3D playback is marred by minor crosstalk and it really should have a 12V trigger) but it easily justifies its ticket ■

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active (no glasses supplied)

4K: No. 1,920 x 1,080

CONNECTIONS: 2 x HDMI; component video input; IR input; LAN for 3D transmitter option; RS-232

BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED): 1,700 Lumens

CONTRAST (CLAIMED): N/A

DIMENSIONS: 407(w) x 179(h) x 464(d)mm

WEIGHT: 10kg

FEATURES: SXRD technology; Reality Creation processing; Panel Alignment processing; $\pm 71\%$ vertical and horizontal image shift; manual 1.6x zoom; 200W UHP lamp; Real Colour Processing Version 2; dynamic lamp control; Motionflow processing; nine preset picture modes; 21dB claimed fan noise in low lamp mode; built-in 3D transmitter; optional external 3D transmitter; optional wireless HDMI kit

HCC VERDICT

Sony VPL-HW40ES

→ £1,850 Approx → www.sony.co.uk

→ Tel: 0845 6000 124

HIGHS: Excellent picture quality; runs quietly; great value; easy to set up

LOWS: Black level response could be improved; no 12V port; no 3D glasses included for free; minor 3D crosstalk; sizable chassis

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Full HD 3D SXRD projector

POSITION: Sony's entry-level home cinema projector

PEERS: Sony VPL-HW55ES; Epson EH-TW7200; BenQ W1500

Saying 'Yes' to YAS

Adrian Justins reckons Yamaha's affordable soundbar offers an impressive audio performance to go with its classy design and build



IT'S NOT JUST Sony using the wedge (with its higher-end flatscreens) to good effect this year – Yamaha has adopted the same shape for its latest front virtual surround system (more commonly known as a soundbar). It's a subtle touch that will probably be lost on many of its users, but overall helps give the impression that a lot of thought has gone in to designing the YAS-103.

This £230 'bar looks classy and is made from good-quality piano gloss black plastic. A white version is also available. The driver array comprises two 2.5in mid/tweeter cones, covered by an acoustically transparent grille and each powered to the tune of 30W. The underside sports a dual-driver 60W subwoofer, joined to a bass reflex port running almost all of the length of the chassis, terminating in a duct outlet shaped like a trumpet bell to limit noise.

HDMI is absent but otherwise connectivity is good; you can choose between a stereo phono pair, two optical digital audio jacks and coaxial digital audio. Additionally, there's Bluetooth streaming, but not CD-quality aptX.

Yamaha has created an iOS and Android remote control app that uses Bluetooth rather than a network connection, and it provides a number of listening modes (music, movies, sport, etc) that aren't available when using the physical remote. The handset itself is about the size and weight of a four-fingered Kit Kat

but a lot less likely to melt. Controls include subwoofer level and engaging the YAS-103's Air Surround, Clear Voice and UniVolume features (the latter puts paid to large variations in volume during ad breaks and when changing channels). There is a smattering of buttons

on the fascia and an array of LEDs that indicate the mode and changes in volume, etc. It's all very slick and easier to operate than a bicycle pump.

When placed on a tabletop the YAS-103 towers some 11cm tall. Even if it doesn't prevent you from seeing the whole of your screen it may well block the remote control signal, so Yamaha has provided a TV Remote Repeater on the back of the 'bar that transmits the signal to the TV.

Effortlessly effective

For its size, this is mightily impressive, pumping out a rich, clean sound from a range of sources. The Clear Voice mode is well suited to use with sports where the sound of the commentator can otherwise struggle against the sound of the crowd, and with dramas such as *24 Live Another Day*, it picks the mumble of Jack Bauer up nicely. Stick on some more complex movie soundtracks, such as *Prometheus*, and the surround mode is worth a go for the increased sonic dispersion it creates and convincing movement given to individual effects, such as the clicking 'pups' in the cave.

The sound from the bass drivers, while never likely to disperse dust from your shelves, is meaty and meshes nicely with the mid/highs. Movie explosions are given the excitement they deserve. Flip over to music streaming via Bluetooth, though, and those twin woofers may need tempering; with Gregory Porter's *Hey Laura* and Lorde's *Royals*, I found the sub reverberated on the high setting that I had decided was good for filmic fun.

Overall, though, the YAS-103 is a sumptuously-designed piece of kit, with a routinely engaging audio performance ■

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 2.5in mid/high drivers; 2 x 3in bass drivers
AMPLIFICATION: 120W
CONNECTIONS: Stereo phono; digital coaxial; 2 x digital optical
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA: No/No
SEPARATE SUB: No
REMOTE CONTROL: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 890(w) x 91(h) x 105(d)mm
WEIGHT: 4kg
FEATURES: Air Surround; UniVolume; Clear Voice; Dolby Digital and DTS decoding; Bluetooth audio streaming and iOS/Android app control; 50Hz to 150Hz subwoofer frequency response; 150Hz to 22kHz front speaker frequency response; learning remote; TV remote repeater function; Audio Delay Control (Lip Sync)



HCC VERDICT

Yamaha YAS-103

→ £230 Approx → www.uk.yamaha.com

→ Tel: 0844 811 1116

HIGHS: Cool design; three digital inputs; easy to use; good, consistent sound; nice app

LOWS: Bluetooth audio streaming not aptX; no HDMI connection

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Bluetooth-streaming soundbar

POSITION: Above the YAS-93, below Yamaha's YSP range

PEERS: Orbitsound SB60LX; JBL SB200; Sony HT-CT260

TRANSFORM YOUR SOUND WITH AN AWARD-WINNING CANTON SOUNDBASE



Canton DM50

Available in Black, White and Silver



"Performance
is excellent"
**HOME CINEMA
CHOICE**

"A lesson in what
a soundbase should
sound and look like"
WHAT HIFI

"Hands down the best
sounding soundbase
on the market"
TRUSTED REVIEWS

Canton DM75

Available in Black, White and Silver



"Canton's super-sized soundbase
makes movie night unmissable
with killer sound quality"
TRUSTED REVIEWS

"Canton has come up trumps
with the DM 75. Clearer, bigger
and more powerful sounding"
WHAT HIFI

CANTON®

Available now from leading stockists including

SEVENOAKS
SOUND & VISION

amazon.co.uk

richerSOUNDS
BIGGEST BRANDS, BEST PRICES, EXPERT ADVICE

John Lewis

No fuss, just thrills

Adrian Justins digs the Media 4's simplicity

DESIGN WAS CLEARLY not near the top of the priority list when Q Acoustics set about imagining its new Media 4 soundbar. Put bluntly, it is as attractive as Boris Johnson in a leotard, and at over 10cm high (including the feet) and 14cm deep, there's no chance of simply sticking it in front of a contemporary screen slouching low on its stand.

But the Media 4 redeems itself with an impressive mid-range specification, including a rock-solid construction and 2.75in full-range BMR drivers, plus a built-in, downward-firing 150mm x 120mm elliptical-design subwoofer. The unit eschews both HDMI and Dolby Digital (set your outputs to PCM) but socketry includes an optical input, stereo phonos, 3.5mm line-in and aptX-equipped Bluetooth.

Operation is more or less a case of scrolling through the inputs (indicated by a coloured LED), as there are no DSP modes to play with – what you hear is what you get – but you can add an additional powered subwoofer. One



setup niggle I found is that if the aux line-in is hooked up the stereo phonos are disabled.

Crash, bang, wallop

The joy of the Media 4 is not in its looks but in its performance. The classic train crash sequence in *Super 8* on Blu-ray is a cacophonous plethora of effects, including flying wreckage, the train whistle, wind howling, kids screaming, the camera winding through and the explosion on an almost nuclear scale. The Media 4 does a sterling job with the lot, generating a broad, powerful soundstage and delivering its sonic goods with refinement. Dialogue

sounds rich, warm and is well-projected, but most impressive is the subwoofer array and the soundbar's handling of low frequencies, which is both potent and yet surprisingly nuanced.

Music is also a pleasure to listen to. The Q Acoustics provides both real punch and strict control, and the unit's BMR drivers deliver a good sense of stereo imaging.

If you can find the space to accommodate it, this is a great one-box option ■

HCC VERDICT

Q Acoustics Media 4 → £400

Overall ★★★★★

PANASONIC SC-HTE80 → £250 approx

Bargain soundbase

Affordable and with excellent connectivity, this is a great all-rounder, says Adrian Justins

WITH A FOOTPRINT of 46cm x 28cm the SC-HTE80 looks (colour differences aside) like a slightly shrunken version of the Canton DM 50 (p90), with largely unadorned surfaces and a dot matrix display hidden behind the cheese-grater grill across the front. Build quality is similar too but its smaller capacity can only withstand a maximum 30kg. Two downward-firing woofers are complemented by just two forward-facing full-range drivers. Further differences become apparent upon making a rear inspection, with the provision

of dual HDMI. Direct connection to a TV can be made by optical means or HDMI as the output socket is ARC-compatible. Bluetooth is onboard, but aptX is absent. Power output is a claimed 30W per channel plus 60W for the sub.

The remote control is compact and lightweight, but not cluttered and works well in combination with the display behind the grille. Calibration options include six DSP modes, dialogue and subwoofer level adjustment, auto gain control and a bass boost.

Despite its lowly power output claim, the SC-HTE80 compares favourably with rivals and is capable of delivering a satisfying soundfield, especially if you choose the right DSP mode. Tony Stark's chatter in *Iron Man 3* is muffled when 3D Clear Dialogue mode is off, switch it on and even all of Selina Myer's aides in *Veep* are distinguishable. Disparate effects in the snow-scene crash and barfight in *Iron Man 3* are clear and the dynamic range remains nicely balanced. Music reproduction with Bluetoothed MP3s feels a little thin in the higher registers and is dominated by the bass response, but at this price, I won't complain ■



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic SC-HTE80 → £250

Overall ★★★★★



Probably the widest range of top quality TV & Hi-Fi Furniture, TV Wall Mounts, TV Lifts, AV Cables & Accessories on show anywhere in the UK.
 Large showroom & carpark, see website for opening hours.



Jual Curve Oak Veneer



UK-CF City Scape



Schnepel Elf

A UNIQUE RANGE OF WALL PLATES



Modular



Multimedia



Speaker



Brush



Computer

Huge selection of HDMI, Modular, Audio, Video, Speaker, Computer, Brush, Network & Multimedia



Jual Curve Walnut Veneer



FIND THE PERFECT SOLUTION FOR WALL MOUNTING YOUR TV

We stock Vogel's Design Mount, Wall, and Thin ranges for next day delivery

- UNRIVALLED CUSTOMER SUPPORT ● FREE DELIVERY (SEE WEBSITE FOR EXCEPTIONS)
- EXPERT ADVICE ● TOP QUALITY PRODUCTS AT INTERNET PRICES

29 - 36 Hallamway, Old Mill Lane Business Park, Mansfield Woodhouse, Notts. NG19 9BG. (Approx 10 miles from M1 - Junction 28 or 29)

Home cinema

Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, or plasma, LCD or LED TV? 3D or non-3D?

Choosing a home cinema system is a potential minefield that must be negotiated with great care or safely avoided by letting experts guide you. If you want to end up with a system that, as a minimum, meets your expectations in terms of picture and sound quality, reading magazine product reviews and choosing the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys can only ever be part of the answer at best. Looking for the cheapest price and having a system delivered to your door, even with a 'knowledgeable' friend to help set it up, is a well-trodden path to disappointment.

There is a bewildering choice of components on the market today and also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, or plasma, LCD or LED TV? 3D or non-3D? Full 1080p capability is now the only sensible choice but the appropriate source components, such as a Blu-ray player, need to be part of the equation.

The sound performance of a system is also hugely important, even more so if you will be listening to music, or music DVD's, through the same system. If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance

of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Having an amp with the right inputs for the best connectivity is essential but you will also need to decide on a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub and, crucially, where they will be sited for the best results. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

Achieving potential

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either, as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that the majority of home cinema systems

selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level. To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity. Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

“ Home cinema
so good you'll believe
you're there! ”



Selecting and installing
home cinema on a
DIY basis may leave
the system performing
at way below its
optimum level.

Confused ?

What and Where to buy

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ...don't start with WHAT, start with WHERE. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit you.

Buying or being sold to

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a carefully selected group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a far better way of doing business than just handing over boxes.



The Dealers listed below have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

Our Top20 AV shops in the country

SOUTH

Chelmsford

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION

216 Moulsham Street. 01245 265245
www.rayleighhifi.com

Kingston-upon-Thames

INFIDELITY

9 High Street, Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530
www.infidelity.co.uk

Maidenhead

AUDIO VENUE

36 Queen Street. 01628 633995
www.audiovenue.com

Norwich

MARTINS HI-FI

85-91 Ber Street. 01603 627134
www.martinshifi.co.uk

Rayleigh, Essex

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION

44a High Street. 01268 779762

CUSTOM INSTALL DEPT.

01268 776932
www.rayleighhifi.com

Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION

132/4 London Road. 01702 435255
www.rayleighhifi.com

Tunbridge Wells

KENT HOME CINEMA

69 London Road, Southborough.
01892 535007
www.kenthomecinema.co.uk

LONDON

Ealing

AUDIO VENUE

27 Bond Street. 020 8567 8703
www.audiovenue.com

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI

190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500
www.grahams.co.uk

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS

61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.
020 7924 2040
www.oandlhifi.co.uk

MIDLANDS

Coventry

FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE

163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200
www.frankharvey.co.uk

Nottingham

CASTLE SOUND & VISION

48/50 Maid Marian Way.
0115 9584404
www.castlesoundvision.com

Solihull

MUSIC MATTERS

93-95 Hobs Moat Road.
0121 742 0254
www.musicmatters.co.uk

NORTH

York

SOUND ORGANISATION

2 Gillygate.
01904 627108
www.soundorg.co.uk



The majority of the above dealers are members of one or both of the major trade organisations, BADA or CEDIA.

www.top20uk.info



STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★
SERVICE ★★★★★
FACILITIES ★★★★★
VERDICT ★★★★★

...Talk to the experts

Sharing, caring soundbar

This single-enclosure 'bar' features welcome DLNA functionality. **Danny Phillips** is impressed



PIONEER'S SBX-N500 IS more ambitious than most soundbars, blessed with multimedia talents many rivals ignore. Courtesy of its built-in Wi-Fi and DLNA certification, you can stream music from PCs and NAS drives, with a YouTube portal thrown in for good measure. There's also Bluetooth, Wi-Fi Direct and Miracast support.

An unfussy black and grey colour scheme makes it a low-key companion for your TV. You can wall-mount it, but it's better suited to tabletop placement. If it blocks your TV's IR receiver there's a built-in repeater. On the back, the SBX-N500 sports a lone ARC-compatible HDMI output, letting you view the Pioneer's menus and YouTube

videos on your display. There are no HDMI inputs, but there are two optical digital ins, alongside Ethernet for wired web connection. On a network, the Pioneer plays ball with MP3, WMA, WAV, MP4 and JPEG files among others. Slam a USB drive into the port and you can add FLAC to the list. Mobile devices can also be hooked up to the 3.5mm input; and on the Bluetooth side, the 'bar' is equipped with a transmitter, sending audio to headphones and speakers.

The twin 3in woofers and two 2.5in full-range drivers deliver a weighty, vibrant sound, with sparkly highs, a feisty (if occasionally wild) midrange and bass by the bucketload. It has no trouble filling

a modest room, giving movie soundtracks impressive scale – although pushed too high the built-in woofers can sound boomy, and even after EQ tweaking bass notes aren't particularly tight or nimble.

But bass issues aside, the SBX-N500 is good value – loud and energetic, with crisp treble and forthright dialogue ■

HCC VERDICT

Pioneer SBX-N500 → £250

Overall ★★★★★

CANTON DM 50 → £400 approx

Setting the standard

The highlights here, says **Adrian Justins**, are the sturdy build and even-handed sound quality

AVAILABLE IN EITHER black or white finishes, Canton's DM 50 may seem expensive at £400 but it's definitely worth the outlay.

Design and build are sturdy and unassuming. Canton claims it can bear a 40kg load – more important are its dimensions of 54 x 30cm. It's big, but note that some larger flatscreens with their in vogue 'open' stands will struggle to perch on top. There are no HDMI inputs to get excited about, but digital optical and coaxial jacks

provide a pathway for PCM signals. Wireless Bluetooth audio is compatible with the CD-quality aptX codec.

The DM 50 offers 200W of power to its tweeters, two mid-range drivers and dual underside woofers. Low-end response is rated at 40Hz, with a subwoofer line out on hand for supplementary grunt if you want it. A fair degree of customisation is offered, with three positioning presets,

treble/bass management, lip-sync adjustment and a virtual surround mode.

The Canton's surround mode merely disperses sound at the expense of dialogue sharpness but stick to straight 2.1 and the performance here is excellent – even muttered dialogue is always intelligible and effects such as clanking metal, explosions and the crash-landing in the snow in *Iron Man 3* resonate with clarity and impact. Music is another strong point; Jeff Buckley's *So Real* (streamed via Bluetooth) offers tremendous bass thump and smooth vocal reproduction. An essential audition ■



HCC VERDICT

Canton DM 50 → £400

Overall ★★★★★

quadral 
HiFi / Surround Speakers



Chromium Speaker Range



BRODMANN
ACOUSTICS



Designed and made by perfectionists, any of the range will bring a live performance into your own home. Available in a range of quality finishes or bespoke finish to blend into your design, nothing is too much trouble. Hand made in Vienna and used in the Grand Festival Hall in Salzburg.

Love at first sound

For your nearest Brodmann or quadral dealer call 0203 5442338
More fantastic products from NuNu Distribution Limited
www.nunudistribution.co.uk

NuNu Distribution Ltd



An all-in-one with ambition

Soundbars and soundbases may be all the rage, but Panasonic's SC-BTT505 shows **Danny Phillips** that a one-box home cinema system can still cut the AV mustard



WITH THEIR COST-CUTTING designs and compromised performance, all-in-one systems are usually seen as the poor relation of separates. But every once in a while a one-box system comes along that more discerning listeners can get on board with. The SC-BTT505 is one such offering.

With this 5.1-channel package, Panasonic has taken a more sophisticated approach to speaker design, using a two-way arrangement and aluminium-enhanced cabinets.

The styling sees Panasonic in adventurous mood. The speakers look particularly dapper. Brushed black aluminium adorns the front, where the sloping top panel curves gracefully into the baffle. And there's a surprise on the back of the main unit – instead of springclips or plugs, the SC-BTT505 uses a set of binding posts. Two HDMI inputs and an ARC-output, optical and analogue inputs, Ethernet and two USB ports make up the socket lineup.

The feature list reads like an A-Z of home cinema – 3D playback, 4K upscaling, aptX Bluetooth, DLNA file streaming, Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD audio, internet apps, Miracast and Wi-Fi. The only niggles are limited internet content (still no 4OD or ITV Player available) and fussy DLNA video streaming, which would only display HD files in SD.

Winter is coming!

Bung in a Blu-ray and you can hear the benefits of those souped-up speakers. During the frantic freeway battle in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, the BTT505's sound is full-bodied and confident. Effects are cleanly and forcefully dispatched, with a satisfying bite to explosions and shotgun blasts. You'll feel the punches and kicks, and cower when cars smash to the ground. This natural dynamism and impressive power keeps excitement levels high and distraction levels low.

What really sets the BTT505 apart is its ability to avoid sounding brash. It keeps composure when you crank up the volume, not something all-in-one systems are noted for. Dialogue cuts through clearly without sounding hard or overly sibilant.

The subwoofer does a good job, injecting a heavy thump when the Winter Soldier slams into a car roof and a rapid 'pop' with every shotgun blast. It needs reining in to curb booming but with careful tweaking it eventually locks tightly to the speakers.

The soundstage is big and weighty and there's decent scale. A 3D Cinema Surround feature claims to add 31 virtual channels to achieve a fuller sound. It's worth checking out – when Falcon starts swooping around, his movements seem more pronounced and there are fewer gaps across the rear stage.

In all, the SC-BTT505 offers a more satisfying, mature listen than you might expect, and when combined with the extensive features and agreeable styling, it's definitely worth auditioning if you're after a convenient home cinema package ■

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes
UPSCALING: Yes. To 4K
CONNECTIONS: HDMI v1.4 output; 2 x HDMI inputs; optical digital audio input; analogue stereo input; Ethernet port; 2 x USB ports; FM aerial input
SACD/DVD-A PLAYBACK: No/No
DTS-HD/DOLBY TRUEHD DECODING: Yes/Yes
CLAIMED POWER OUTPUT: 1,200W
DIMENSIONS (MAIN UNIT): 430(w) x 65(h) x 326(d)mm
WEIGHT (MAIN UNIT): 3kg
FEATURES: DLNA media streaming; internet apps; Miracast; Bluetooth with aptX; NFC; 3D Cinema Surround; iPod/iPhone playback via USB; control app for iOS & Android; USB media playback; H.Bass; Whisper Mode Surround; Centre Focus; picture presets; LincSD amp (2nd generation); 2D-to-3D conversion; FM radio; optional wireless rear speaker kit

HCC VERDICT

Panasonic SC-BTT505

→ £600 approx → www.panasonic.co.uk
 → Tel: 0844 844 3899

HIGHS: Full-bodied sound; good composure; punchy bass; unusually stylish design; lots of features

LOWS: Limited catch-up TV apps; long-winded setup; some niggles with DLNA video streaming

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

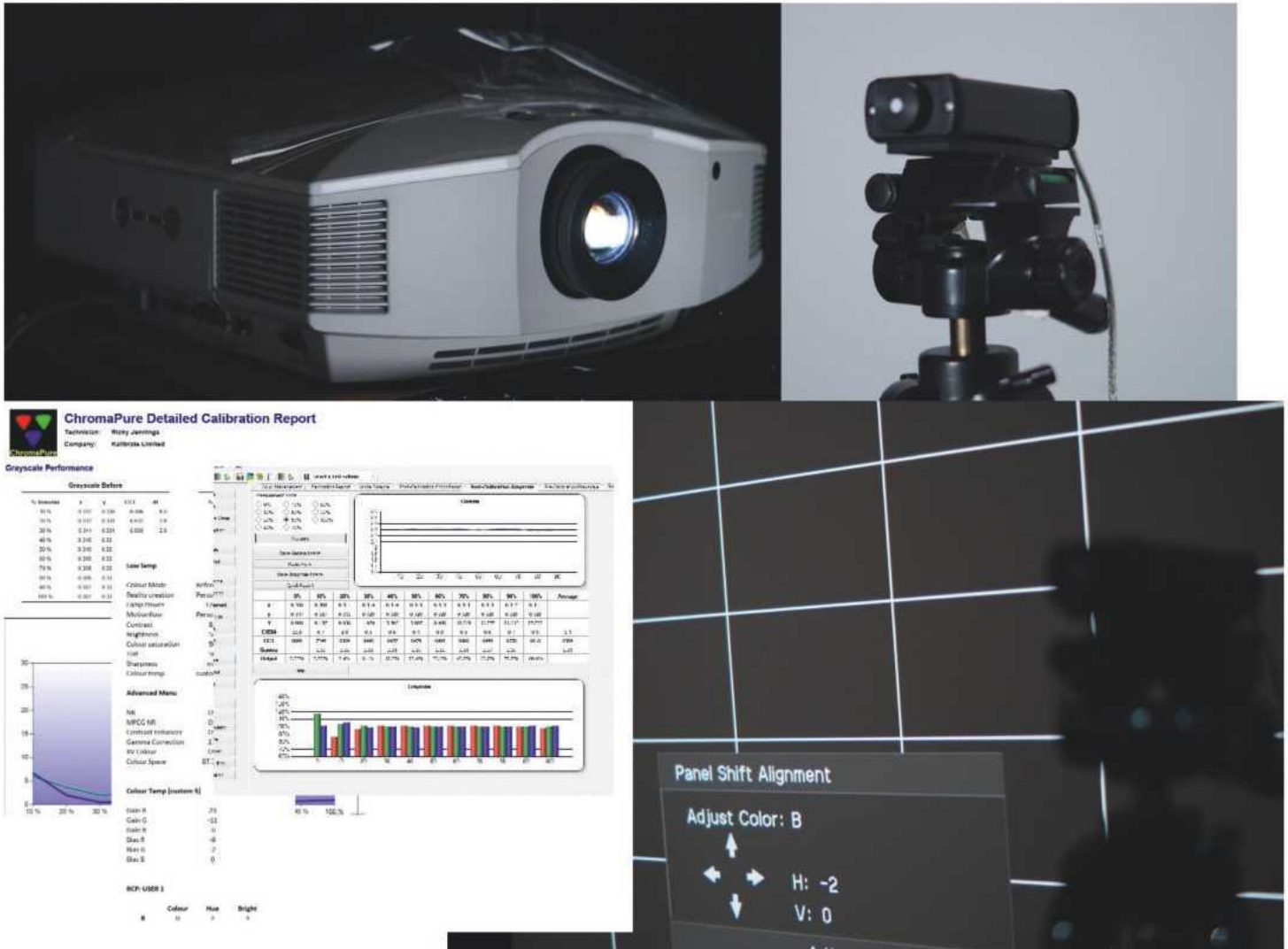
PRODUCT:
Upper mid-range 5.1 system

POSITION:
Below a tallboy iteration in Panasonic's stable

PEERS:
Samsung HT-H7500WM; Sony BDV-N7200W

KALIBRATE LIMITED

PRE-SHIPPING CHECKS AND CALIBRATIONS ON ALL PROJECTORS
SOLD



Find out more by visiting
www.chromapure.co.uk/news.asp or
by scanning the QR code with a smartphone or tablet:



WWW.KALIBRATE.CO.UK
EMAIL: SALES@KALIBRATE.CO.UK
TELEPHONE: 01883 460 225 OR 07947 007644

10 MINS FROM JCT 6 M25, AND M23

THX
CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL
ON STAFF



Bass born in the USA

Subwoofer stalwart SVS is on a mission to get cinema fans to upgrade their bass bin.

Mark Craven reckons it shouldn't be too hard a sell



PRICED AT £650, the SB-2000 is targeted at those eager to sample the delights of serious subwoofer technology without breaking the bank, or rearranging their furniture. A sealed design (SVS has a new ported woofer, too, the PB-2000), the American manufacturer claims it's 'compact'. I'd take that with a pinch of salt – it's not massive, but it's hardly dinky, either.

The SB-2000 uses both a new driver and a new power plant. The former is a front-firing 12in unit that, says the brand, benefits from some extensive R&D – more than 20 prototypes were apparently tested before the woofer design (incorporating the magnet, motor and spider assembly) was finalised. All this was done, I'm told, to find an equal partner to the freshly-conceived Sledge DSP amplifier, which is rated at 500W RMS

(1,100W peak) – a 200W increase on the previous model used in the SB-1000.

Style-wise, the SB-2000 suffers somewhat from black box-itis, although I like the black ash finish of our review sample (it's also available in gloss black). A curved grille is supplied.

The SB-2000 marries a 12in driver to a 500W Sledge DSP amplifier

Installation is simple. There's no room EQ offered here, just phase, volume and crossover dials, plus in/outputs and an Auto Standby mode. The latter enables you to save on energy bills, but I found it a bit ponderous to wake up, so deactivated it.

Barnstormer

For the asking price, SVS's SB-2000 is a barnstormer. It provides hair-raising levels

of low-frequency fun – dropping deep while exhibiting fast feet – without any sign of cabinet stress. While some subs can draw attention to themselves for all the wrong reasons, the SB-2000 just sits there, doing its thing, and letting you enjoy its performance.

With *Homefront* (Blu-ray) it adds tight, authentic weight and punch to the pounding fists as Jason Statham's hero takes a beating in a boathouse, and revels in the elongated, shifting bass note that corresponds to him being submerged in water. Its output is rich and inviting. With *Pacific Rim*, meanwhile, the footsteps of rampaging Kaiju and Jaegers become immensely scary occurrences, imbibed with an omnipotent low-end thud – when Gipsy Danger takes a swing at its otherworld foe in downtown Hong Kong City, the impact is seriously impressive, delivering the cinematic scale and presence that the filmmaker intended.

Switching over to music, the SVS proves equally adept at handling basslines, with its agility paying dividends. Again, its measured tonality comes to the fore here, and you can use the crossover control to optimise its interaction with your stereo speakers.

Essentially, there's nothing not to like about the SB-2000's performance. Of course, you can get bigger, deeper-sounding subs, but they will cost you more. For a small/medium-sized room, this is ideal ■

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 12in 'high-output' bass driver
ENCLOSURE: Sealed, front-firing
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 19Hz (-3dB)
ON-BOARD POWER: 500W Sledge DSP amp
REMOTE CONTROL: No
DIMENSIONS: 360(w) x 360(h) x 430(d)mm
WEIGHT: 15.8kg
CONNECTIONS: LFE input; stereo line-level input; stereo line-level output

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 12in home cinema subwoofer

POSITION: Middle one of three sealed woofers; SVS also offers ported and cylinder designs

PEERS: REL T-9; Velodyne EQ-Max 12

HCC VERDICT

SVS SB-2000

→ £650 approx → www.karma-av.co.uk
 → Tel: 01423 358 846

HIGHS: Excellent value for money; quick, agile performer; impressive low-end extension; easy to setup

LOWS: Auto Standby mode best left off; not as compact as you might wish

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Taking on all-comers

With its half-kilowatt of bass power and active/passive dual driver array, **Adam Rayner** finds the new REL S5 to be deeply worthy. Literally...



REL MAKES SUPERB active

subwoofers in general and this one is so good, it is peer to at least one 15in model and other products nearly twice the price. In the S5, driver and amplifier engineering have created a new benchmark.

This £1,600 sub uses a massively solid box with a chunky 'feature' grille that is easy to remove, and four thick supports to hold it off the floor. Bars on the side help you lug it about – it weighs 31kg – and design ticks include a logo badge on the top plate in a metallic finish. A wireless model in glossy black or white only (I'd like a wood option), it has a small aerial socket and a flip switch on the back. When used with REL's Longbow transmitter (an optional extra), it

will pair and receive the bass signal as a composite of both high-level from the speaker feed and the low-level phono input. The S5 has direct-connection sockets on the back too, adjusted by crossover knob but separate gain controls for both high- and low-level

Sidebars help you move the S5 around your room during setup

inputs. You also get a 10m cable with a Speakon plug.

The 12in long-excursion front driver has a large surround and 550W of Class D amp to drive it. Underneath, floor-firing, is a thin 12in disc of high-tech carbon fibre, also on a roll suspension. This is passive and offers the S5 benefits over ported or sealed designs.

Now the time is here

Iron Man 3 on Blu-ray had its plastic wrapper broached, and screened for the first time since I saw it at the flicks. I connected the S5 via a Y lead to both my amp's phono stereo sockets, as well as using the Speakon plug fixed to the main outputs. It was very easy to setup and get a good result, yet you will no doubt tweak the gain levels for a movie or three initially.

The first and best thing immediately apparent of the S5 is the scale it gives to the whole multichannel soundfield. It will make all your speakers sound effortlessly larger and more dynamic, not just add low-end boom.

Of course, the spectacular effects you would want for this sort of spend do not disappoint. As it is sealed, it is tight and fast. And as it has a passive bass radiator, it can be explosive and drop like a stone to play real infrasonics. At the line, 'Do we need to worry about that?' Stark's house gets blown up. If you can hear/feel the heartbeat at the very end of this mayhem-filled sequence, then you may well have a REL.

This woofer can be seen to reach a limit but if you find it your home will likely be shaking with structure-borne bass as you do so. And, yes, it's hardly cheap, but I'd argue it offers fantastic value; as good as REL's previous Stentor but for a good amount less. And if you need more, REL's Gibraltar range is for certifiable types, or castle owners.

A definite audition for serious cinema hedz with sizeable budgets ■

SPECIFICATIONS

- DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x driven 12in front-firing massive excursion driver; 1 x down-firing 12in Passive Bass Radiator
ENCLOSURE: Sealed. Short feet hold the unit above the floor to pressurise the down-firing passive driver
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: -6dB at 21Hz
ON-BOARD POWER: 550W RMS
REMOTE CONTROL: No
DIMENSIONS: 444.5(w) x 455.5(h) x 551.5(d)mm
WEIGHT: 31.6kg
CONNECTIONS: Single phono for LFE input; stereo phonos for low-level input; Neutrik Speakon socket for high-level input. Aerial socket for reception of RF bass signal with optional Longbow wireless system



HCC VERDICT

REL S5

→ £1,600 Approx → www.rel.net
 → Tel: 01656 768 777

HIGHS: Literally awesome speed; huge low extension and adds massive scale with perfect grip; plenty of connective options
LOWS: No wood finishes available; the Longbow wireless system, included with REL's Habitat sub, is an extra here

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Premium 12in woofer with wireless option

POSITION: Top model in the new S series, priced above REL's T series

PEERS: Paradigm Studio Sub 12; MA GXW15

Gilding the Blu-ray lily

Oppo's flagship Blu-ray player now offers Darbee processing and DSD support – **Steve May** takes a closer look at this high-end heavyweight



A REFRESHED VERSION of the reference status BDP-105EU, the universal BDP-105D may not be significantly different for the Oppo faithful to warrant trading up to, but it is sufficiently pimped to demand a fresh look. It has the stature of a small AV receiver, but build quality is ferociously good. The disc-loading tray slides out with refined deliberation, rather than clattering urgently. Pride of ownership comes into play here.

To the right of the central disc tray are HDMI and USB ports, plus a full-size headphone jack with a high-grade headphone amplifier that connects directly to one of the deck's two 32-bit Sabre DACs. So straight from the off you know this isn't a regular BD deck.

One of the more interesting features on the BDP-105D is Darbee Visual Presence. This offers three types of image processing, with variable intensity on each: Full Pop, Hi-def and Game. What exactly is Darbee doing? To shed some light on the processing in action, I used a 1080p monoscope with Darbee effects visible in a scrolling split screen. On Full Pop, it was clear that the processor was creating intrusive

imaging artefacts when used at more than 20 per cent; the higher the processing power the worse the smeary effect. At less than 20 per cent, the artefacts became undetectable, but then so did any major benefit. Both the Hi-Def and Gaming modes prove less disruptive, but outside of a minor contrast lift I can't see any reason to indulge it. Some of my colleagues are more amenable to it – feel free to experiment.

Frankly, this Oppo doesn't need additional help. In terms of visual acuity, the BDP-105D is natively sublime. HD images offer monumental detail and texture retrieval. This player, coupled to an upscaled 4K display, delivers a stunning image. Anyone arguing that *Gravity* can only really be appreciated in a cinema needs to get an eyeful of such a combo.

Sonically, the Oppo takes anything in its stride. *Overture: The Earth* by Kosuke Yamashita, in 96kHz/24-bit 7.1 Dolby TrueHD, sounds positively majestic; spacious and crystal clear. And, of course, CDs can take advantage of the deck's excellent DAC, outputting high-fidelity analogue stereo.

While the BDP-105D largely shows all other players in its price range a clear pair of heels, there are elements to the spec that not everyone will want or need. I'll wager those XLR connections will find employment in a relatively limited number of systems, and, personally speaking, I don't want a laptop anywhere near my AV system. However, if you're interested in DSD as a high-quality music option then the player's new support over USB will be

welcome. From a practical of view, the sheer size of DSD remains a deterrent to general adoption, but the file format certainly sounds sensational. While I would normally advocate system builders opt for a separate DAC, there's no doubt that this Sabre-toothed Oppo competes at a very high level.

So the BDP-105D retains its reference status. It's the player to beat if you're looking to make the most of your disc and file collection. Blu-ray at its brilliant best ■

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes
UPSCALING: Yes. To 4K using Qdeo processor
MULTIREGION: No. Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: Yes. 2 x v1.4 outputs; 2 x v1.4 inputs
COMPONENT: No
MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE: Yes. 7.1 and stereo phono; stereo balanced
DIGITAL AUDIO: Yes. Coaxial and optical inputs; coaxial and optical outputs
ETHERNET: Yes
BUILT IN WI-FI: No, but Wi-Fi dongle is supplied
SACD / DVD-A: Yes/Yes
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD DECODING: Yes
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD BITSTREAM: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 430(w) x 123(h) x 311(d)mm
WEIGHT: 7.9kg
FEATURES: Asynchronous USB-B DAC input; Darbee Visual Presence processor; digital volume on all analogue outputs; Gracenote look-up; 3 x USB ports; app control; bespoke toroidal power supply; dedicated headphone amplifier; DLNA media playback; extensive file support including MKV, AVI, MOV, MPEG, MP3, WMA, WAV, FLAC, DSD; RS-232 control; IR port; fanless design

HCC VERDICT

Oppo BDP-105D

→ £1,100 Approx → www.oppo-bluray.co.uk
 → Tel: 0845 060 9395

HIGHS: Stunning build quality; excellent video performance; audiophile-grade music playback; versatile connectivity

LOWS: Darbee Visual Presence of questionable value; inaccessible Smart apps on UI; DSD 128 file failure on our sample

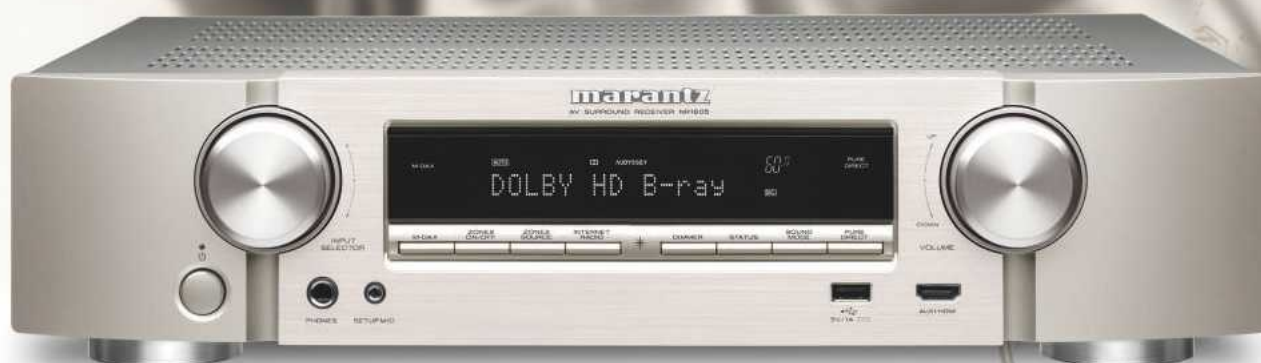
Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

the sound of
craftsmanship



The art of AV Receivers

With WiFi and Bluetooth connectivity, the NR1605 AV Receiver lets you enjoy all your digital files - wherever they are. And with 4k Ultra-HD you get breath-taking pictures, razor-sharp lines. All in an elegant slim-line design with a powerful punch. Enjoy!



marantz®

www.marantz.co.uk

because music matters

Blu-ray for the 4K masses

Sony finally puts the wheels back on its Blu-ray bandwagon with this surprisingly grown-up looking disc-spinner. Which suits **Steve May** fine



SONY HAS A chequered history when it comes to Blu-ray. Its last high-end player was back in 2009, the admirably over-engineered BDP-S5000ES. Then, BD decks were simpler affairs, dedicated to the task of extracting the maximum number of bits from discs. Things have moved on. Playing platters is now just one part of a suite of functionality, which also covers network file playback and subscription VOD. And in the intervening years Sony's fleet has been commoditised, compromising creditable electronics with lacklustre cabinetry.

The BDP-S7200 represents a reversal of that direction. While not a premium player (this is still a 2.3kg cheapie), it seems a much more considered offering. Cosmetically, it's less fussy than recent players from the brand. We've lost the barmy stealth angles in favour of a fascia that's clean and minimalist; a slab that will more easily stack with other AV gear.

The nippy menus reveal interesting functionality. Setup options include the usual variety of adjustable display parameters, including 4K upscaling. There are two modes here: Auto 1 and Auto 2. The former maintains 1080p Full HD for video material but plays out

JPEGs at 3,840 x 2,160. Auto 2 also upscales video material to 4K.

Getting dirty with ol' Spidey

With a Blu-ray, images have outstanding definition, subtle gradations and a vibrant colour palette.

We're all so inured with broadcast HD it's easy to forget how magnificent BD can look in comparison. *The Amazing Spider-Man*, one of Sony's first Mastered in 4K releases, offers up an intricate web of detail, from the subtle textures on Spidey's suit, which gets dirtier throughout the movie as his battles intensify, to the snarling CGI minutia on the Lizard's face.

Performance can be further enhanced for UHD screen owners, thanks to the 4K scaler. In many ways this feature is one of the player's bigger surprises, bringing fresh nuance to Full HD material. I partnered the BDP-S7200 with Sony's KD-65X9005A, itself no slouch when it comes to upscaling 1080p. That flatscreen, left to do all the work with the BDP-S7200, looks fine enough, but the player's processing offers something new and a little different. When Gwen Stacy turns up at the Parker house after a funeral, her tear-stained visage has considerably more texture via the player's 4K output than when upscaled by the TV. And while the UHD TV is great at resolving the wicker chairs on the porch behind Stacy, it struggles with her skin tones. The BDP-S7200 is far more comfortable here; her freckles clearly belong on her face, and no longer seem to float just above her skin. The deck also does an extraordinary job rendering her woollen hat and coat – the chipper inside the BDP-S7200 seems more creative when it comes to interpreting complex detail and noise. That said, the TV has the edge when it comes to delineating fine vertical and horizontal lines. Which was better? That's a matter of personal taste, but what's clear is that this BD player is doing something admirable and different from what we've seen before. And it's doing all this for just over £200 ■

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes
UPSCALING: Yes. To 4K
MULTIREGION: No. Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: Yes. 1 x output
COMPONENT: No
MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE: No
DIGITAL AUDIO: Yes. 1 x coaxial digital audio
ETHERNET: Yes
BUILT IN WI-FI: Yes
SACD/DVD-A: Yes/No
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD DECODING: Yes
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD BITSTREAM: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 430(w) x 49(h) x 210(d)mm
WEIGHT: 2.3kg
FEATURES: 2 x USB inputs; iOS/Android app control; 4K video upscaler; 4K photo support; access to Sony Entertainment Network content portal; DLNA media playback of MPEG, AVI, MKV, WMV, MOV, MP3, AAC, WMA, FLAC, DSD, AIFF, ALAC, JPEG, PNG, GIF, MPO; Super Wi-Fi; 2D-3D conversion; Gracenote; Digital Sound Enhancement Engine (DSEE); Quick Start feature; Miracast screen mirroring

HCC VERDICT

Sony BDP-S7200

→ £220 Approx → www.sony.co.uk
 → Tel: 0845 6000 124

HIGHS: Cracking BD image quality; super-fast disc loader; hi-res audio file support; internal 4K upscaling worth investigating

LOWS: No dual-band Wi-Fi support; lightweight build quality; not best for catch-up; some may be sick of the XMB interface

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
4K upscaling Blu-ray player

POSITIONING:
Currently the highest specified BD deck from Sony

PEERS:
Pioneer BDP-170;
Samsung BD-F7500

Film and music maestro

Panasonic's DMP-BDT700 offers plenty of high-performance tricks that gain **Mark Craven's** seal of approval



PANASONIC RETURNS TO the upper tiers of Blu-ray hardware with its DMP-BDT700, chucking nearly everything at a new range-topper that could well be its last high-end Full HD outing before 4K discs become a reality. With its £500 ticket, it competes against rival machines from the likes of Oppo and Marantz, but very much goes off in its own direction.

The feature set here is both overwhelming and a little disappointing. The latter because Panasonic has left Super Audio CD and DVD-Audio support off the spec sheet. This isn't a surprise considering the brand's history, but for some audiophiles it will scratch the DMP-BDT700 from their wishlist. This would be a shame as it has other audio talents up its sleeve – including a full 7.1-channel suite of analogue outputs, 192kHz/32-bit DAC, hi-res FLAC and WAV playback, and post-processing modes to make the most of music sources.

On the video side, the DMP-BDT700 claims THX-certified 4K upscaling (and 50/60p 4:4:4 support) and 4K JPEG playback, with an SD card slot behind the front flap offering easy ingress for your home-brewed hi-res snaps.

Thought has gone into the DMP-BDT700's styling. It combines a glossy top panel and brushed fascia with chunky silver feet and looks quite lush. The user interface has been given a premium makeover, too, with a sharply rendered in-depth menu system that makes the setup process fairly slick. You can even add

your own wallpaper to the home screen. A shame you can't re-decorate the Viera Connect hub, which remains a bit slow to use and in-yer-face. Netflix is, of course, an option here, but won't serve up Ultra HD streams. 4K JPEGs, on the other hand, arrive with all

their intricate details and mesmerising sense of depth intact.

With a Sony X9005B TV, switching the player's output between Full HD and 4K and viewing from a sensible distance, there were no obvious upscaling differences to report. There's an argument that Panasonic's latest UniPhier chipset may be of more use with the cheaper 4K panels on the horizon – armed with less potent silicon – than Sony's 2014 flagship. That said, I was happy to leave the Panasonic in 4K output mode (and ready for my 4K still images) for simplicity's sake.

With *Django Unchained* (BD) uprezzed to 4K, the deck's visuals are immaculate. It's an assured, devastatingly detailed performance. I was impressed by its natural image, which combines high contrast with smooth motion and a sensibly neutral palette, whereas some BD decks can ramp up colour saturation. Hooked up to a Full HD display, the Panasonic still enthralls.

And it certainly moonlights as a cracking audio player. Two-channel CD presentation (via analogue) is full of body. Johnny Cash's *I Hung My Head* moseys out of my speakers with Old West charm, with the Man in Black's mournful vocals picked sweetly out from the piano and acoustic guitar. Bruce Springsteen's *Downbound Train* is similarly emotional. To cheer myself up a bit, I turned to The Monkees, and found the player's range of Sound Effect modes worthy of investigation, particularly the six vacuum-tube imitating Digital Tube Sound options, which usher in more bass weight and, yes, warmth to the jangly '60s pop. The same tools can be used with hi-res digital audio files – the Panasonic performed as advertised, relishing the clarity of 24-bit FLAC and WAV but drawing a blank with DSDs.

Overall, this is an accomplished love-letter to Blu-ray from Panasonic. A deck with quality construction, great connectivity, welcome features and an A-grade performance ■

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes
UPSCALING: Yes. To 4K via 4K Direct Chroma Upscaling
MULTIREGION: No. Region B BD/R2 DVD
HDMI: Yes. 2 x outputs
COMPONENT: No
MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE: Yes. 7.1 and stereo phono
DIGITAL AUDIO: Yes. Coaxial and optical outputs
ETHERNET: Yes
BUILT IN WI-FI: Yes
SACD /DVD-A: No/No
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD DECODING: Yes
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD BITSTREAM: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 446(w) x 68(h) x 246(d)mm
WEIGHT: 7.9kg
FEATURES: 2D-3D conversion; 4K JPEG playback; 4K 50p/60p 4:4:4 output; USB; SD card slot; DLNA media playback (renderer and player); hi-res FLAC and WAV playback; Miracast screen mirroring; Wi-Fi Direct; picture adjustments including sharpness, noise, colour, gamma, contrast, brightness, saturation and hue; Sound Effect modes (Remaster and Digital Tube Sound with 192kHz/32-bit upsampling); High Clarity Sound; Viera Connect Smart hub

HCC VERDICT

Panasonic DMP-BDT700

→ £500 Approx → www.panasonic.co.uk
 → Tel: 0844 844 3899

HIGHS: Audio processing features; pristine image quality; neat design and solid build; Smart features; 4K JPEG playback

LOWS: Intimidating barrage of video tweaks; not a universal player; Panasonic's Smart hub is still a weak link

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Premium 4K upscaling BD deck

POSITION:
Panasonic's flagship disc spinner

PEERS:
Oppo BDP-103D;
Sony BDP-S7200;
Marantz UD7007



A media player for the format fanatic

Martin Pipe has plenty of devices that offer networking functionality, but none are quite as fully-featured as Dune HD's Base 3D

AV INFO

PRODUCT:

High-end media player

POSITION:

The pinnacle of Dune HD's media player/accessory range

PEERS:

Mede8er MED1000X3D

DUNE HD'S BASE 3D shows how media player manufacturers are rising to the challenge of Smart TVs, tablets and the latest Blu-ray players. Although not ridiculously expensive, the Base 3D is easy to install (it even checks for new firmware when connected) and offers plenty of features that you won't find on non-specialist gear. It's very much a media player for the serious AV enthusiast.

A look at the Base 3D's slim but full-width fascia hints towards just one of its feature strengths – under a flap is a 3.5in SATA HDD bay. Nothing unusual there; many such players can accommodate an internal hard drive for storing all of your favourite movies, photos, TV programmes and music in one secure place. In this instance, though, the drive just slips into the unit, a sprung bracket holding everything in place. No screws or wires to mess around with, in other words.

Dune HD lets the side down somewhat by failing to provide a device-mode USB port that would allow your computer to treat the Base 3D's HDD as an external drive itself. But it's still definitely worth adding your own memory; with an HDD on board, the versatility

of the unit is greatly enhanced. Connect it to your network (Wi-Fi and Ethernet hookups are provided – use the latter for the most robust connection) and you'll find that it's capable of acting as a file-server (SMB), too. In other words, your additional media devices will be able to stream content stored on it. Neat. Local storage alternatives include a trio of USB ports, and an SD card slot for convenient playback of photos or video from a digital camera/camcorder, which immediately makes it more user-friendly than most modern Smart TVs.

Media marshal

Naturally, the Base 3D is also capable of pulling media off other servers lurking on your home network. SMB, NFS and uPnP/DLNA protocols are supported, meaning that it's unlikely you'll encounter any access problems. As regards compatibility with different media types and compression standards, the Base 3D absolutely trounces the average Blu-ray player, and many direct competitors, come to think of it.

Music fans are well catered for. MP3, WMA, FLAC, OGG and WAV audio? You got 'em – and in 24-bit, if available. There's even a



headphone socket for personal listening. A fluorescent display and (sparse) front-panel controls are provided, but selecting tracks is best done with the attractively designed onscreen menu system.

Stereo DTS and Dolby Digital soundtracks can be fed out from the analogue phons on the Base 3D's rear. Coaxial and optical digital audio outputs handle multichannel, but you're more likely to hook the unit up to your AVR via its HDMI port.

Do this and the wonders of Blu-ray-sourced DTS-HD Master Audio and Dolby TrueHD soundtracks (passed through) will be open to you, because the Dune can handle BD rips – in native 1080p24, too. The best option

'Dune HD's Base 3D is quite responsive in use and delivers audio and video to a high standard'

is to get the third-party ripping software to generate an ISO disc image. Note that on selecting this file for playback you don't get the Blu-ray's complex menus – instead, you're presented with a list of chapters. These are left intact for quick selection of a specific scene, and you can choose from 2D and 3D content if available.

For those with a collection of the latter, stereoscopic compatibility from a media player is a real boon. 3D Blu-rays employ a technology known as MVC (Multiview Video Coding) to squeeze the left- and right-eye views into a single stream. The player then transmits it, using a process called frame packing, as a standardised Full HD 3D signal that your display can understand. And guess what? The Base 3D does the same. I tried a couple of 3D BD rips with an Epson EH-TW7200 projector, and they played fine.

The PJ even automatically recognised the 3D format used. With one of them, I did, however, have to engage the projector's 'invert glasses' function to get the correct results.

The Base 3D, like any other hi-def player or digital TV set-top box, is also compatible with the side-by-side and top/bottom 3D formats. Then there are all the video codecs and standards. X.264/H.264, MPEG-1/2, MP4, FLV, MKV... all of the key ones were grist to the Base 3D's mill.

You can even play recorded TV transport-streams (.TS files, both SD and HD), which is handy if you own a PC with tuner. And if you don't, PVR facilities can be added to the Base 3D simply by plugging in a USB tuner. It might not be able to deal with Blu-ray menus, but DVD ones are a different matter. With VIDEO-TS folders and ISO images alike, you get exactly the same features and menus that would be expected when playing the original disc with a conventional DVD player.

Talking of menus, I've only touched the surface. During playback, a pop-up pane provides you with access to various functions. Among them are the ability to change deinterlacing mode (handy for playing back old SD material), zoom, audio lip-sync adjustment, time-search, subtitles and audio track selection.

And then there are all the other things the Dune HD can do that aren't exactly headline features, including internet radio, games (including *Sudoku*, *Chess Challenge* and *Tetris*), Facebook/Twitter apps and a web browser. More features can be added via an app store. You can even control the unit from your smartphone via a free iOS/Android app, which I found to be a perfectly adequate substitute for the no-frills handset.

Stable performer

It would, of course, all be utterly pointless if the Dune HD had a lousy performance, but it's quite responsive in use and delivers audio and video to a high standard – thanks in part to its high-tech Sigma SMP8673 media processing chip. It's at least as good as a budget 'big-name' Blu-ray player – HD pictures are characterised by strong detail and dynamic range, and the unit has a good stab at SD upscaling. Onboard audio is also fine, although most users will instead be relying on their AV receiver to do the decoding. Network streaming proved to be glitch free, too.

Overall, this is an exciting and worthwhile media player for the AV addict who demands a little more. The full-width design looks great (although it's not the most reassuringly solid of devices) and its format support and ease-of-use are hard to fault. Where it falls foul of the mainstream competition is its provision of video-on-demand apps, but you've probably got a million other devices that access Netflix, haven't you? ■

ON THE MENU



→ Dune HD's onscreen display is gorgeously presented, with attractive icons helping you navigate its myriad features, and it's responsive, too. Control is via the handset or free app

SPECIFICATIONS

HDD: No. Fit your own 3.5in SATA – up to 8TB supported

CONNECTIONS: Ethernet; 3 x host mode USB; HDMI v1.4 output; composite video output; component video output; coaxial/optical digital audio; stereo analogue audio output; SD card slot; headphone

AUDIO FORMAT SUPPORT: MP3, WMA, AAC/M4A, APE, OGG, FLAC (up to 24-bit/192kHz), WAV (up to 24-bit/192kHz), AIFF (up to 24-bit/192kHz), Dolby Digital/DTS (5.1 passthrough); Dolby TrueHD (passthrough) DTS-HD Master Audio (passthrough)

VIDEO FORMAT SUPPORT: MPEG-1, MPEG-2, X.264/H.264 (inc. MP4, MKV) MVC, WMV, XviD (not all); MPEG-2 and H.264 off-air transport streams; ISO disc images; VIDEO_TS DVD rips; GIF/JPEG/PNG/BMP still images

DIMENSIONS: 429(w) x 56(h) x 299(d)mm

WEIGHT: 2.5kg (no HDD)

FEATURES: Wi-Fi built in; onboard HDD caddy (hot-swappable); 3D support; playlist support (with shuffle/repeat); video upscaling; file browser; Java app support; screen saver; web browser; internet radio; (simple) games; passthrough of HD audio; 1080p24 support (plus NTSC/480i, PAL/576i and 480p/576p/720p/1080i/1080p); onboard file server, record and playback IPTV; copy between network/SD card/HDD; customisable user interface; Sigma Designs SMP8673 chipset; 512MB RAM; 256MB plus 4GB flash memory

HCC VERDICT



Dune HD Base 3D

→ £250 Approx → <http://my-htpc.co.uk>
→ Tel: 0113 322 94 96

HIGHS: Incredibly flexible and easy to install/use; high standard of AV performance; will handle just about anything

LOWS: Can't passthrough specific audio codecs; some older DivX/XviD files wouldn't play; competing platforms offer more VOD

Performance ★★★★★

Design ★★★★★

Features ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Wireless 9.1 in the can

Sony's luxurious 'phones are the next best thing to a forest of floorstanders, says **Steve May**



The 'phones are supplied with an HDMI surround sound processor

THE PROSPECT OF high-performance wireless surround headphones should be a mouthwatering one for home cinema enthusiasts. After all, it's not always possible to run your AV system at full throttle, so the idea of multichannel private listening has great appeal.

The two-piece MDR-HW700DS comprises headphones and HDMI surround processor. The latter sports three HDMI inputs and one output, plus optical digital audio in/outputs and a pair of stereo phono inputs. Typically users will forgo the control buttons on the processor itself and run the system entirely via the headphones. A small knob on the bottom of the right-hand earpad calls up the menu system for the processor onscreen. The cans also offer input and DSP effect controls, plus a volume dial; mastering these takes a little time.

Delivering the 9.1-channel soundstage is proprietary Virtualphones Technology. This surround simulacrum adds two additional rear

channels and a pair of front heights to the standard 5.1 mix. Imaging is surprisingly accurate. Running the sound channel check on *The Expendables 2* Blu-ray, the headphones accurately placed all the channels in a 7.1 mix and made a good stab at recreating the Neo:X 11.1-channel option too. There's a real sense of scale and spaciousness to the soundstage.

Overall, these are a compelling alternative to a full-blown speaker experience. The headphones reach deep and transmission is interference free. Finally you don't have to compromise on volume or immersion when you want to crank it up in the small hours! ■

HCC VERDICT

Sony MDR-HW700DS → £450

Overall ★★★★★

LINDY CROMO NCX-100 → £100 approx

Cutting through the noise

Ed Selley ignores the outside world with some affordable noise-cancelling cans

BETTER KNOWN AS a manufacturer of cable and connection accessories, Lindy has recently been extending its range of electronics and now has a full suite of headphones and earphones. Of these, the Cromo NCX-100 is by far the most interesting. An active noise-cancelling design with carry case for £100 – what's the catch?

Nothing in terms of build or appearance suggests that the NCX-100 is built down to a price. While the styling suffers from influences of 'Dre-ism', the build is sturdy and the headphones themselves are very comfortable to wear, and supplied with useful

accessories including a mic for portable devices. They can be used as a normal passive design, but insert two AAA batteries into a housing on the side and you get a claimed 95dB noise reduction, selected by a control switch with an additional enhanced bass mode.

The positive mood continues when you listen to them. In passive mode, the NCX-100 is a little shut-in compared to open-back designs, but detail and tonality are good and the natural noise isolation of the design is effective too – you don't leak

much audio back into the outside world. With the noise-cancelling in play, the system is effective but refined in how it works, so there is none of the slightly dead feeling you can get with rival models. The processing works better on low-frequency noise rather than high, but I would argue it's more than effective for planes and trains. The bass enhance mode is about the only thing that is best ignored, as it sounds far too lumpy and unrefined. It can, of course, be switched off. The 1.4m cable could do with being longer, but overall these are a cost-effective domestic option and great for travel ■



Plop two AAA batteries in the Lindy cans to enjoy noise cancelling

HCC VERDICT

Lindy Cromo NCX-100 → £100

Overall ★★★★★

4K PROJECTION REACHES NEW PRICE POINT!

SONY VPL-VW300ES

Confirming their dominance in the 4K projector market, Sony release a more affordable model, still providing an impressive 1,500 lumens and sharing its panel technology with the multi-award-winning VPL-VW500ES.

This projector is a real highlight of the season.

ON DEMO NOW!



NEW!

NATIVE 4K

DEMONSTRATIONS AVAILABLE IN OUR LONDON WEST END FACILITY

Come and experience the finest products available in AV. We hand-pick products & solutions that offer something special, then show them off to their absolute best in our new West End facilities. Our adaptable AV demo room just off Oxford Street can go from a

light-controlled blacked-out configuration to a white room with ambient window light (and various stages in between). Tailored to perfectly match your home viewing environment.

Demos are strictly by appointment only. Contact us now!

SIMPLY THE BEST!

OPPO Darbee models **103D** and **105D** bring **DarbeeVision Visual Presence™** image enhancement to their critic's reference universal disc and streaming players. DVP embeds real depth information into a video stream, bringing unparalleled clarity and depth for a more lifelike experience. **"It's like lifting a veil."**

The EISA award-winning and great value **103EU** is also available. See our website for details.

OPPO UNIVERSAL PLAYERS

Impressive reviews throughout the AV and hi-fi press focus on amazing video performance for all OPPO players and the stunning audiophile credentials of the range-topping **105D**. **Come and audition and find out for yourself!**



OPPO PLAYER MODIFICATIONS AVAILABLE. VIEW THE WEBSITE FOR THE FULL RANGE!

Planar magnetic magic to your ears

Oppo pulls out all the stops with its premium PM-1 headphones. **Steve May** wants a bank loan

OPPO WILL BE best known to *HCC* readers as the long-standing champion of high-end universal Blu-ray players, but now the brand has spread its wings into the roiling headphone market with the PM-1s. Of course, these are not just any old cans, but high-performance ear-warmers that utilise audiophile planar magnetic technology.

Everything about the PM-1s is premium. They ship in a gloriously lacquered wooden box and come with optional velour covers should the oh-so-soft and supple lamb-leather cups not be to your liking. There's also a posh denim carry case and two detachable cables: a copper cable wrapped in black fabric and terminated with a 6.35mm (1/4in) jack plug for AVR use; and a shorter 3.5mm lead.

Although large, the PM-1s are relatively light at just 395 grams, and the padded headband and overall balance is extremely comfortable. While these cans are sensitive enough (at a claimed 102dB) to be used with smartphones



and mobile media players, they're not best suited to commuting; the over-ear open back design lets in too much ambient noise. They're best considered domestic headphones.

Build quality is exceptional, and attention to detail is high. The planar magnetic drive units employ a 7-layer diaphragm, comprising a spiralling pattern of flat conductors etched on both sides (hence the sensitivity). The tech lends itself to pristine articulation and wide spatial imaging, teasing out details and separation from stereo music. And although

Oppo has gone for the high-end jugular with its debut headphones

sweetly crisp they don't lack for bass; close-quarter pressure loading adds a visceral but well-balanced kick that's ripe for action movies. Another benefit of the design is extremely low distortion – the PM-1s offer a relaxed, smooth listen that's a perpetual treat for your lugholes.

Undoubtedly pricey, but with the level of performance that you'd expect ■

HCC VERDICT

Oppo PM-1 → £1,100

Overall ★★★★★

SIMPLE AUDIO LISTEN → £400 approx

Simply rather stunning

Mark Craven auditions some Bluetooth/PC speakers that mix artful design with audio prowess

THERE ARE MANY reasons you might want some smallscale active speakers in your life – bringing quality audio to an office, bedroom or kitchen being the most obvious. The market

is booming, so it certainly helps that Simple Audio's Listen cabinets, while being pricier than some rivals, sport a fabulous design. They're 20cm-high, neatly dressed in black fabric grilles and aluminium chassis, and blend in easily wherever you put them. Inputs include Bluetooth, 3.5mm and USB, via a supplied adaptor, so feeding them shouldn't be a problem.

Desktop divas

Simple Audio reveals that the Listens' tweeter and midbass drivers are pushed by separate amps. Other audiophile niceties include a dose of DSP and passive drivers to aid bass performance. The result is highly impressive. These desktop divas easily

convey the laidback '70s groove of Led Zeppelin's *The Rover*, with the rich bass notes and Robert Plant's wailing vocals perfectly balanced. More importantly, they're unfazed by full-bodied tracks; Manic Street Preachers' *Motorcycle Emptiness* is anything but empty, and the clarity of the rhythm section, strings, vocals and lead guitar is superb, even as the track swells towards its climax.

Stereo imaging is good, the sound is large and, aside from the lack of user EQ (which might help to tame a slight bass-heavy bent), I have little to complain about. Even the touch-sensitive controls are über-cool ■



The two speakers tether via a custom cable – two lengths are provided

HCC VERDICT

Simple Audio Listen → £400

Overall ★★★★★

JVC

OUR PROJECTION OF THE FUTURE



4K
e-shift3

Lift your viewing experience to new heights with the latest 2014 range of 3D enabled D-ILA Projectors from JVC.* Featuring an industry leading native contrast ratio of 150,000:1 and a dynamic contrast ratio of 1,500,000:1.**

Not only is the range designed for ultra-high 4K resolution and is 60p ready. It also has the new JVC e-Shift 3 technology, this means it can shift sub-frames to achieve 4 times the pixel density of the original

content, bringing you an even greater level of definition.

Now in it's sixth generation, our D-ILA Projectors have always set new standards. Capable of delivering images of advanced quality with extreme realism and presence in your home cinema environment.

But after all seeing is believing, so to arrange a product demonstration email hdworld@jvc.co.uk
Or for more information visit: www.jvc.co.uk

DLA-X500R has been awarded:



DLA-X700R has been awarded:



* The 2014 range of JVC D-ILA Projectors consists of model numbers DLA-X900R, DLA-X700R, DLA-X500R. Visit www.jvc.co.uk for more details. ** Contrast ratio specifications are for the DLA-X900R. 3840x2160 (4K e-shift3 – not native 4K).

Follow us on  [jvccuk](https://www.facebook.com/jvccuk)  [@jvccuk](https://twitter.com/jvccuk)

Time to replace the remotes

Adrian Justins enjoys a universal control app that majors in macros

FOR THOSE IN the know, Nevo used to mean complex remotes and hardware for the custom install market, but OneForAll has resurrected the brand name for a downloadable app that turns an Android tablet or iPad into a universal remote control. It works in combination with the URC8800, a small wireless bridge that emits IR signals from its fascia as well as via a corded extension.

Delving into the database

With the bridge hooked on to your Wi-Fi network, setup is a straightforward process of finding kit from OneForAll's 300,000-strong online database. Most items are honed in on by the app asking you to try a sample button, but you can simply enter the model number and be done with it. Once setup, you select a device from a large icon and a generic image of a remote appears on the left, allowing you to zoom in on a section of its controls. You can



edit the virtual remote control functions but entering letters to search Sky's EPG seems beyond the app's grasp.

That aside, on my 7in Archos tablet the app worked really well, with clear, responsive graphics and faultless execution of commands. Up to 20 macros can be easily added – for example I soon had the app set to switch on my Sky box, amplifier and TV and

The small URC8800 wireless bridge won't upset your feng shui

select the correct inputs. This is the Nevo's real strength, as an app in itself isn't always faster than having separate remote controls.

The built-in EPG is the least impressive aspect here, but it makes a useful backup for browsing schedules without disturbing your family's live TV viewing. Overall, this

is a solid control option at a tempting price ■

HCC VERDICT

One For All Nevo → £60

Overall ★★★★★

MANHATTAN PLAZA HD-T2 → £50 approx

Freeview HD with a touch of Smart

Apps including YouTube help this budget set-top box stand out, says **Grant Rennell**

NON-RECORDING FREEVIEW HD boxes aren't exactly sexy but can serve a purpose with a legacy TV, and the Plaza HD-T2 also comes with tempting apps.

This (not especially) little black box sports HDMI, Scart and composite video outputs, coaxial audio and stereo phono audio outputs, an aerial loopthrough, an Ethernet port (there's no Wi-Fi, sadly) and a USB port solely for applying software updates. The plasticky remote is easy to get to grips

with, and sports a dedicated button for a YouTube app.

Manhattan's user interface is very accessible. An attractive fullscreen EPG can show certain types of channel such as radio, HD or those in a favourites list and be used to set reminders. A 'browsing bar' displays now-and-next programme info.

Apps include BBC iPlayer and the aforementioned YouTube. The latter supports one-touch streaming from an Android device, with search and sorting functionality and HD streaming. Other apps are BBC Sport and BBC News, plus VuTV, the SD streaming PayTV service which includes Comedy Central, History and MTV. A code for a

free month's viewing is included, after that it will cost you £7 per month. Manhattan suggests a minimum 3Mbps connection for content streaming.

Hi-def and good-quality standard-def Freeview TV looked superb on my TV when output over HDMI; even RGB Scart pictures impressed, although fuzziness was evident using the composite output. Video streamed smoothly from the apps, with the exception of some jerkiness when scrolling through the BBC Sport offering.

If you have a non-Freeview display in the house, the Plaza HD-T2 is worth picking up ■



The Plaza HD-T2 offers a customisable EPG

HCC VERDICT

Manhattan Plaza HD-T2 → £50

Overall ★★★★★

AURO-3D OR DOLBY ATMOS? WHY CHOOSE?



The **Datasat Reference Series RS20i** and **Luxury Series LS10** are the first home cinema processors in their category to support both **Auro-3D®** and **Dolby Atmos®**. Now you have fully immersive 3D cinema sound in your home. Why worry about the audio format? Just sit back and enjoy a new experience in breathtaking sound.

DATASAT. BRINGING CINEMA SOUND...HOME.



DATASAT
DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT



+44 (0)118 934 9199 • europesaless@datasat.com • www.datasatdigital.com

Going mains-stream

Martin Pipe tries Devolo's latest powerline-networking package

POWERLINE NETWORKING – using your mains wiring to transmit more than just power – is a practical way of getting high-speed data, including HD video, around the home without relying on Ethernet tangles or crowded Wi-Fi bands. The £120 dLAN 650 Triple+ twin-pack from Devolo harnesses a patented 3-wire 'coupling' technology known as Range+ to achieve transfer rates of up to 600Mbps. Range+, I was told, will remain exclusive to Devolo gear (the latest HomePlug AV2 standards explore alternative tech avenues to improve coverage and speed).

One of the large but fairly cool-running dLAN 650 devices plugs into a wall socket near your router, connecting via Ethernet. The other device is located where network connectivity is needed, with a three-port Ethernet hub enabling multiple gear to be plumbed in. Both units sport status LEDs and mains sockets to replace those 'lost'. The devices are easy to install, and, although not

essential, the Cockpit Windows/Mac config software is welcome. They also worked well, providing glitch-free streaming of SD, HD and even 4K material from a NAS to a Samsung



TV. Even across the somewhat elderly wiring of my house, data transfer rates of over 300Mbps were measured.

I tried older HomePlug powerline adaptors (Devolo dLAN 200AVMini, Solwise PL1000) for compatibility, and both successfully integrated into my mains data network. Speeds were significantly lower (100Mbps) but useful nevertheless. In any case, it's good to know your older kit can still be used. The use of mains distribution boards and different mains 'rings' (i.e. upstairs and downstairs) slowed down things slightly, but data transfer rates were still serviceable ■

HCC VERDICT

Devolo dLAN 650 Triple+ → £120

Overall ★★★★★

HDANYWHERE MHUB → £1,000 approx

Return to the matrix

Steve May discovers HDanywhere's mHub matrix is insanely versatile



WITH A MULTIPLICITY of HD sources fighting for ingress into our TV screens, be they in the living room, bedroom or bathroom, managing and distributing them traditionally presents a challenge. The mHub, an HDMI over IP matrix, presents a powerful solution. With it you can route any combination of four sources to any combination of four HDMI-equipped displays, using Cat5e (and up) cable as the carrier between the transmitter and receiver. The system can deliver Full HD/3D video (up

to 60p), at distances rated up to 50m. Design of the main unit is a tad bland – this is primarily intended for racking in a boot room (ears are supplied). You also get four diminutive receivers. Each requires its own power supply, and has an RJ45 connection, plus IR RX/TX jacks, an HDMI output and coaxial digital audio breakout.

Setup takes no time at all (for most the challenge will lie in simply running individual Ethernet cables to required locations) and the mHub is versatile when it comes to configuration. There are local mirrored HDMI outputs for each of the four inputs on the mHub itself, so the matrix can also function as an HDMI switcher for the main viewing

location. This local matrix output is available even when routing HDMI over IP from the same output to one of the receivers.

The transmission of HD video is artefact free; IP-delivered material looks identical to source. A variety of motion resolution tests delivered via Blu-ray revealed no unwanted anomalies. The HD video at the display end is a mirror of what's going in.

When it comes to multi-source HD signal distribution, the HDanywhere mHub takes some beating. It offers extreme versatility, is simple enough to install, and performs well. Can we have one in black plastic please? ■

When it comes to multi-source HD signal distribution, the HDanywhere mHub takes some beating. It offers extreme versatility, is simple enough to install, and performs well. Can we have one in black plastic please? ■

HCC VERDICT

HDanywhere mHub → £1,000

Overall ★★★★★



Absolute Quality



CX-A5000

11.2 Channel Pre-Amplifier



MX-A5000

11 channel Power Amplifier

The Ultimate in Home Cinema,
from the biggest sound company
in the world.



facebook.com/uk.yamaha.av
<http://uk.yamaha.com>

Powered by music

Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current technology?
Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **HCC** is here to help

3D needs to ditch the spex

In the last issue [*HCC* #241], John Archer, while reviewing the LG 65UB980V, says that had 3D always looked this good on TVs it would have been more successful.

The main problem with domestic 3D is simply the inconvenience of the spectacles. Whereas people are happy to wear them in a cinema, they are a nuisance at home. So many people watch television today whilst using their smart device, they would have to keep taking their glasses off to check or make comments on their phone.

The only chance 3D had was autostereoscopic, and when that

failed to take off it was doomed.
Ian Davies, via email

John Archer replies: I think it's safe to say that 3D hasn't been a rip-roaring success for the TV manufacturers. Or, indeed, for broadcasters – the BBC has put its 3D programming on indefinite hold and Sky has ceased to broadcast 3D football games. I would suggest that 3D has found its most appreciative audience in home cinema enthusiasts, which was always likely to be the case, as the format works best when writ large. Just compare the impact of 3D on a 42in TV with a 100in projector screen!



LG's 4K screens employ Passive 3D

★ STAR LETTER...

I want Atmos – but want to keep my amplifier!

It seems that Atmos is the greatest thing to happen to movies since the invention of talkies, which means that AV brands will no doubt see an uplift in Atmos receivers when some customers upgrade their equipment more quickly. But I think it's a bit cavalier for some manufacturers to say there is no Atmos upgrade path for existing equipment. Surely this will only irritate their very best customers – i.e., those who bought high-end kit in the last couple of years. I understand it is not possible to download or retrofit a Dolby rendering engine but surely they can licence a BD player that decodes the channels at source, allowing existing amplifiers to be used?

Ion Mitchell, via email

Mark Craven replies: An interesting point, Ion! We went to Dolby's 'evangelist' Jonathan Jowitt, for an explanation:

'At its simplest level, the Dolby Atmos renderer converts audio streams and object metadata into a set of analogue signals for driving

the speakers. The final stage of playback is either powered speakers – where the input is line-level audio – or passive speakers with the amplification from an AVR or amp.

'The AVR needs to know where the speakers are placed and what type of speakers are used to accurately render the audio. If the renderer was moved upstream to a Blu-ray player, then that Blu-ray player would also need to know where the speakers are. So, the Blu-ray player would effectively become an AV pre-amp.

Remember: until the metadata is rendered with knowledge of the speaker layout, it is NOT audio in the truest sense – it's merely a collection of monophonic audio sounds with a bunch of metadata.

'The Dolby Atmos renderer circuit is also able to upmix discrete 5.1 channels passing through the AVR, where the source might be DVD, games console or other media input. You would not want this to happen in the Blu-ray player – it would need so many inputs it would effectively become, again, an AV pre-amp.

'Dolby Atmos AVRs also have far more outputs than a normal AVR. If your reader didn't upgrade his AVR, no matter what he did with the player or OTT feed, the maximum number of speakers he could drive remains unchanged.'

Star letter-writer Ion Mitchell wins a copy of the *Pulp Fiction: 20th Anniversary Collector's Edition* Blu-ray boxset, which is available to buy now courtesy of Lionsgate UK.





Avatar kickstarted the 3D trend – will Avatar 2 (due in 2016) re-ignite it?

4K displays like the gorgeous LG 65UB980V make the Passive 3D experience with BDs better than it's ever been, and with that particular flavour of stereoscopic tech concerns about glasses (charging, transmission) aren't an issue. So we're still excited by 3D and not prepared (yet) to write it off entirely. Stereoscopic Blu-rays keep coming (this month we've enjoyed *Sin City 2*), and we'll keep watching them.

Autostereoscopy does seem to be dead in the water, but in 2010 filmmaker and 3D guru James Cameron said adoption of the tech was still '8-10 years out'. So there's plenty of time yet to ditch the spex...

I love my cinema setup!

Hello, I've been reading your magazine for some years now and it has proved invaluable in my buying decisions, so keep up the good work!

I like to dive in when new home cinema technology is available and I have been through all the formats – VHS, S-VHS, Laserdisc, Phillips CDI, DVD, HD-DVD and Blu-ray! I have just finished a bit of a home cinema upgrade and currently have an LG 49in 4K TV (49UB850V), an Onkyo TX-NR636 amp (I'm just waiting for the Atmos speakers to arrive) and all the usual kit (Blu-ray player, Blu-ray recorder, PS3, PS4, Xbox 360, Xbox One and YouView box).

Now I'm just waiting for some native 4K video, apart from what I've managed to find online, to make the most of my new setup! Still another year before 4K Blu-ray arrives and I am not that impressed with the Netflix 4K offering. I have yet to try Amazon, so that will be my next port of call! Let's hope my 4K investment doesn't go to waste, like certain past formats.

One last thing, Passive 3D looks stunning on the LG 4K TV! I've always been an Active 3D advocate but after getting the LG I have been blown away by the 3D picture. If you love 3D then a 4K screen is the way to go. Cameron Grey, via email

Mark Craven replies: Glad to hear you're enjoying your home setup, Cameron, and that our advice has proved useful!

You're not the first person to say they're unimpressed with the 4K offering of Netflix. While its in-house series are being produced in 4K, there were no 4K movies available to stream when I checked recently (maybe I'm wrong – I'm not in love with Netflix's search facility...). It has said it will be ramping up the quantity of 4K content at the beginning of 2015, but has also raised prices. While the single-screen SD plan remains at £5.99 per month, to stream 4K you need to be on the £8.99 per

HOME CINEMA | MULTI-ROOM AUDIO | MULTI-ROOM SKY & HDTV | LIGHTING CONTROL | HOME AUTOMATION

For a demonstration in our showroom call 01922 623000 | www.getthebigpicture.co.uk

THE
big
PICTURE



Certified
Electronic
Systems
Professionals



Certified
Kaleidescape
Specialist
installer



Home
Acoustics
Alliance
Certified



Imaging
Science
Foundation
Certified



month four-screen plan. Which, unless you happen to have a quartet of 4K displays, means you are now paying a premium for that resolution hike when earlier in the year you weren't. And another thing I've noticed is that Netflix keeps these pricing plans hidden until you've signed up for membership – the website simply states 'plans from £5.99 a month'. Odd.

However, I don't want to get a reputation as a Netflix-knocker. The platform should be applauded for driving the 4K content revolution forward, and I'm looking forward to seeing what it can add to its library.

I'm staying in for films

Totally agree with Chris Owen (Star Letter, HCC #241) about the cost of going out to see a film these days, and I think his £20 estimate for a family of three is generous! For us at our local cinema it costs £25, more if the films are in 3D. Compare that to the cost of a Blu-ray (although

I usually buy when 3-for-2, etc, offers are on) and it's very expensive.

That's why we only go out to the cinema for certain movies. However, I've now read that the Odeon chain is going to be charging an extra £1 for some blockbuster films, so even that may change.

D Summers, Hampshire

Anton van Beek replies: Cinema ticket prices obviously vary depending on location – my local Odeon charges £10.80 for an adult ticket on the weekend. And, yes, recently it added a £1 premium for tickets for the latest *Hunger Games* movie, Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies*. The Odeon has said this is part of a 'dynamic' pricing policy that also allows it to offer reduced-price tickets at other quieter periods, and is used to cover the additional staff costs that showing these blockbuster flicks entail.

Identical drivers work for me

Hello. Regarding Richard Stevenson's discussion of using a 5.1 system for both music and movies [*Point of View*, HCC #240], well, I use my 5.1 setup for movies, television and music. The music comes mostly from CDs but also from Super Audio CD, DVD-Audio and a Blu-ray's isolated score. And I never change the speaker balance or the subwoofer volume. My Bowers & Wilkins 600 S3 speakers are a good match all around, especially as I have models with 6.5in mid/bass drivers for the centre, left/right floorstanders and surround satellites. If I expand to 7.1 I may have to go to the 700 Series to find a dipole/monopole speaker with the same-diameter driver. I think that way there will still be good timbre-matching without having to buy seven floorstanders! – and maybe this is a good tip for people looking to buy a speaker setup for all sources?

Patrick, from Belgium

You can enjoy both bigscreen and smallscreen

I'm sure Richard Stevenson doesn't expect us to take his suggestion of watching movies on a tablet held close to our head seriously [*Point of View*, HCC #241], but yet again this is close to how plenty of people do enjoy TV programmes, iPlayer etc. Members of my family enjoy watching movies on my home cinema system, but also use tablets/laptops. The good thing is that they do appreciate the quality of the bigscreen and surround sound speakers!

Steve Melton, via email ■

CONTACT US...

Write to HCC, AV Tech Media Ltd, Enterprise House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF, or email us at letters@homecinemachoice.com

Please note: we cannot guarantee to print/answer all the letters we receive. Sorry.

Win! Three great Blu-rays up for grabs

Just email your answer to Competitions@homecinemachoice.com to be in with a chance



Sin City: A Dame to Kill For 3D

Get ready for something a little naughty and nice when this long-awaited sequel to the 'adults-only' comic book adaptation

hits DVD, Blu-ray and 3D Blu-ray on December 15. Thanks to Lionsgate UK we have five 3D Blu-rays up for grabs.

Question:

Which of the following is the creator of the *Sin City* comics and Robert Rodriguez's co-director on the films?

Answer:

A) Stan Lee B) Neil Gaiman C) Frank Miller
Email your answer with '*Sin City 2*' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!



The Expendables 3

Stallone, Statham and the rest of the gang are back (with a few new faces) in this third instalment of the explosive action trilogy. *The Expendables 3* is available to buy now on

DVD and Blu-ray, and thanks to Lionsgate UK we've got five Blu-ray copies to give away!

Question:

Which of these action movie legends plays the villain in *The Expendables 3*?

Answer:

A) Mel Gibson B) Arnold Schwarzenegger C) Steven Seagal

Email your answer with '*Expendables 3*' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!



The Strain: The Complete First Season

Get ready for a new breed of horror with new TV series from the mind of cult director Guillermo del Toro. *The Strain: The Complete*

First Season is released on DVD

and BD from December 15, courtesy of 20th Century Fox – and to celebrate we've got three Blu-ray sets to give away.

Question:

Which of the following films was not directed by Guillermo del Toro?

Answer:

A) Mimic B) Blade C) Hellboy

Email your answer with '*Strain Season 1*' as the subject heading – and include your postal address!

Terms & Conditions

1. Entrants must be aged 18 or over and resident in the United Kingdom. 2. Employees of MyTimeMedia Ltd and companies supplying competition prizes are not eligible to enter. 3. No responsibility will be accepted for delayed, mislaid, lost or damaged entries. 4. Only one entry per household; multiple entries will be discounted. 5. Prizes will be awarded to the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing date. 6. No alternatives, cash or otherwise, will be offered to the winner as prizes. 7. The editor's decision is final. 8. The closing date is January 22, 2015.



**SUBSCRIBE
FOR
£19.99**
UK OFFER ONLY

WE'VE GOT CHRISTMAS SORTED! Have you?

Why not avoid those long shopping queues this year and treat your loved one to their favourite magazine? You get to save time & money, and they get their magazine delivered direct to their door!

You could even treat yourself... Don't miss out – **subscribe today!**

Home Cinema Choice

6 issues for £19.99

Saving 26%

~~Full price £27.00~~

Hi-Fi Choice

8 issues for £19.99

Saving 44%

~~Full price £36.00~~

Hi-Fi News

8 issues for £19.99

Saving 44%

~~Full price £36.00~~

Subscribe securely online: <http://mymagazineoffers.co.uk/X301>

Call: 0844 543 8200 and Quote X301 **By Post:** Please complete the form below and post it to the address provided. Quote Ref: X301

YOUR DETAILS: (This section must be completed)

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms Name

Surname

Address

.....

.....

Postcode

Country

Tel/Mob

Email

D.O.B.

(Complete if the subscription is for yourself)

Magazine Price

GIFT SUBSCRIPTION: (Complete 'YOUR DETAILS' first)

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms Name

Surname

Address

.....

.....

Postcode

Country

Tel/Mob

Email

D.O.B.

(Complete if gift recipient is under 18)

Magazine Price

PAYMENT DETAILS

Please make cheques payable to MyTimeMedia Ltd and write code X301 and magazine title on the back.

☐ Postal Order/Cheque ☐ Visa/MasterCard ☐ Maestro

Cardholder's name

Card no:

.....

(Maestro)

.....

Valid from Expiry date Maestro issue no

Signature Date

SEND TO:

**MYTIMEMEDIA SUBSCRIPTIONS, TowerHouse,
Sovereign Park, Market Harborough, Leics LE16 9EF**

TERMS & CONDITIONS: Offer ends 31st December 2014. UK offer only. Gift subscriptions will begin with the first available issue of 2015 and personal subscriptions with the next available issue when order is placed. For full terms & conditions visit <http://www.mytimemedia.co.uk/terms>. From time to time, your chosen magazine & MyTimeMedia Ltd may contact you regarding your subscription, or with details of its products and services. Your details will be processed in full accordance with all relevant UK and EU data protection legislation. If you DO NOT wish to be contacted by MyTimeMedia Ltd & your magazine please tick here: ☐ Email ☐ Post ☐ Phone. If you DO NOT wish to be contacted by carefully chosen 3rd parties, please tick here: ☐ Post ☐ Phone. If you DO wish to be contacted by carefully chosen 3rd parties, please tick here: ☐ Email

A free greetings card will be supplied with all gift subscriptions;

Please note that this will be sent to the payer's address, separate to the order confirmation. Although we will strive to supply this card prior to December 25th 2014 we cannot guarantee this for any orders placed after December 5th 2014.

home technology at your fingertips

Progressive Home Technology systems give you control of music and TV, lights and blinds, heating and security, all at the touch of a button

PROGRESSIVE
HOME TECHNOLOGY

Progressive Audio Visual Ltd
Unit A4 Speldhurst Business Park, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN3 0AQ

01892 860801
progressive-ht.com

BHFUnlimited .co.uk

Home Cinema Screen Specialists

Crosby & Bown

- Glass Bead & Matt White
- 4:3 & 16:9
- Full HD Compatible
- Full Remote Control



From
Just £69.95

Huge Range & Next Day Delivery

01636 639 900

For competitive quotes email
sales@bhfunlimited.co.uk

Starscape

Fibre Optic & LED Lighting



Growing numbers of professional home cinema installers in the UK are turning to Starscape for fibre optic and LED solutions, not to mention our professional customers in Belgium, Switzerland, Portugal, South Africa, the Czech Republic and South Africa.

Photo: Artcoustic SA and Sphere Custom Design

However, we're also proud of the friendly, no-jargon service that we offer DIY home cinema enthusiasts. Our fibre optic and LED lighting can add that finishing touch to your room, and you'll find it surprisingly affordable, and easy to install. Creative use of lighting can make all the difference between just a room with a large TV/projector and a truly distinctive and personal space.



To learn how fibre optic and LED lighting can feature in your project phone 01289 332900 and speak to John or Peter, or e-mail info@starscape.co.uk. See the website for step-by-step home cinema lighting project reports.



Woodside

Berwick upon Tweed, Northumberland. TD15 2SY.

E: info@starscape.co.uk T: +44 (1289) 332900 www.starscape.co.uk



DIGITAL COPY

Mark Craven is celebrating the end of one year by getting over-excited about the next one. Although with 4K leading a step-change in AV, he's not about to forget about Full HD

AS THE END credits roll on 2014, I'm eagerly anticipating what promises to be a landmark year in home cinema. If the AV Gods are smiling, 2015 will introduce 4K Blu-ray, more discs with Dolby Atmos soundtracks, a possible 3D audio rival in DTS MDA, and a greater range of 4K displays at even more wallet-tempting prices. Sky may even lift the lid on its 4K broadcast plans. What we conceive to be a state-of-the-art system now could look vastly different in twelve months time.

Exciting, isn't it? Well, I certainly think so, but I'm also aware that for the people who have just tacked down the final bit of carpet in their newly-minted cinema room, and are receiving credit card statements long enough to be used as Christmas bunting, the last thing they want to hear about is a new era of AV. Well, don't panic! Home cinema is a flexible beast...

Don't believe the hype

The word 'obsolete' is bandied around far too much for my liking. Venture on to Twitter or other social networks and you can come across scare-mongering technological know-it-alls who appear to derive perverse pleasure from confusing regular consumers by telling them the thing they've just bought is useless. Sometimes, they'll tell you that something that *hasn't even been launched* yet is already obsolete. Smart cookies.

4K video is a good example. **I have had conversations with usually sane people who announce that 4K is pointless because 8K is already being worked on.** It's the kind of logic I could buy into if I was, say, a giant tortoise and expecting to live to over 150, but not when I've pretty much crested the life-expectancy hill and am rolling nervously down

the other side. Life is simply too short to wait around for the next big thing.

And, anyway, the introduction of one new format or standard doesn't render all its competitors worthless. DVD, for instance, has been around now for 17 years and is still going strong. And what about vinyl? That old-timer format is positively resurgent, despite the alternative CD/digital file options. In 2014 sales exceeded the 1million mark for the first time since 1996, helped by the stampeding herd of audiophiles rushing out to buy Pink Floyd's *The Endless River*. And Blu-ray, as I have written before, isn't 'dead' just because you can now stream HD movies.

So 4K Blu-ray will be an option for home cinema enthusiasts (and hopefully a very tasty one), but it won't be a necessity. If you've just invested in a nice new Full HD projector, or are still getting good use out of your five-year-old plasma TV, there's no need to bury your head in your hands. Good ol' hi-def is pretty spiffy anyway.

And the same applies to Dolby Atmos. Ideally, we'd have speaker arrays in our own rooms to rival those in commercial cinemas, driven by a giant stack of power amps and processors. But the majority of us can't. Even domesticated Dolby Atmos poses installation problems, and the need to upgrade your AV receiver or processor – issues that will rule it out for some. Yet, again, that's nothing to get het up about.

Home cinema comes in all shapes and sizes, speaker configurations and resolutions. So whether you're gearing up for a major upgrade, or enjoying your LaserDisc collection on a CRT TV, we're right there with you ■

*Do prototype 8K TVs put you off investing in 4K?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Mark Craven's
New Year
resolution is to
actually learn the
words to Auld
Lang Syne rather
than just
mumbling along
like an idiot





FILM FANATIC

This issue's Movie Awards prompts **Anton van Beek** to fret about the way that major Hollywood studios are treating classic movies on Blu-ray

THANKS TO OUR annual HCC Movie Awards, this time of year is always pretty fraught for me. First, I have to gather together all the BD and DVD reviews of the last twelve months, and then comes the judging process itself.

As always, the nominations are a mix of the painfully obvious and the fiercely contested. So, while the likes of Best Picture Quality, Best Audio Quality and even Best Disc fell into place pretty quickly, others proved much more troublesome – the most obvious example being Best Remaster.

The past year has seen the release of a stunning array of restored movies making their bow on BD – far more than we've been able to celebrate in these pages. If I had my way there would have been at least another ten or more nominations in that category.

However, with only one or two exceptions, none of them would have been for a hi-def platter put out by any of the major US studios. Whereas a few years ago film fans were buzzing with excitement about extensive restoration projects undertaken by the likes of Sony Pictures and Warner Bros. for such classics as *Lawrence of Arabia* or *Gone with the Wind*, these days the impetus lies with indie labels such as BFI, Second Sight, Arrow and Eureka.

That's not to say that the Hollywood studios aren't still digging into their back catalogues from time to time for Blu-ray releases. **The problem is that they have clearly earmarked a number of classic titles they believe deserve such extravagant treatment** (and more importantly, will keep selling) and simply return to them over and over again, in some sort of hi-def Groundhog Day. This is why we've witnessed Blu-ray re-releases of films like *Sleeping Beauty*, *Ghostbusters*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the*

Wind in 2014, while other classics like *The Big Sleep*, *The Philadelphia Story*, *Roman Holiday* and *His Girl Friday* still languish in the vaults at their respective studios.

The same... but worse

At least in the case of *Ghostbusters* and *The Wizard of Oz* the Blu-ray re-releases were partially motivated by the creation of new scans/restorations (4K and 8K respectively) and additional bonus features. Far more irksome were the likes of *Sleeping Beauty* and *Gone with the Wind*, which are being re-released on Blu-ray with exactly the same AV specs as their previous versions, but with fewer supplementary extras this time around.

The '75th Anniversary Edition' of *Gone with the Wind* that arrived in the UK recently is particularly egregious, serving up the same film disc that appeared in the original 2009 Blu-ray, but ditching the hours of extras that featured on the old bonus disc and replacing them with two new featurettes that can barely muster a combined running time of 40 minutes. Importers should note that the all-region US version released back in September includes both bonus platters.

This is why it's vital that we continue to support the efforts that indie labels are making when it comes to licensing back catalogue titles for release on Blu-ray – and why it's even more important that we do all we can to encourage the major distributors to open their lockers to these smaller companies. After all, if they aren't prepared to do anything with all of those wonderful movies on Blu-ray, what's the harm in licensing them to companies that will? ■

*What films are you still waiting for on Blu-ray?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Anton van Beek also wishes that James Cameron would give up on his *Avatar* sequels and just hurry up and sign off *The Abyss* and *True Lies* in hi-def





PROFIGOLD PROV1200 SERIES

Features: Profigold HDMI interconnect with up to 17Gbps bandwidth.

- High Speed HDMI interconnect with up to 17 Gbps bandwidth for extreme display performance
- Follows the HDMI directives for superior 3D image resolution up to 4k x 2k
- Audio Return Channel for High Definition 7.1 digital surround on your Home Cinema system.

Available in 6 lengths:

PROV1200 0.5m £22.49	PROV1201 1m £26.99
PROV1202 2m 31.49	PROV1205 5m £69.96
PROV1210 10m £149.99	PROV1215 15m £179.99



PROFIGOLD PROI3400 SERIES

iPod hi-fi audio cable, portable audio interconnect, 3.5mm to 2 x phono RCA.

Features: Profigold iPod hi-fi audio cable for portable audio and mp3 players.

- Superior grade 99,996% Oxygen Free Copper conductors, for lowest possible signal loss.
- Multiple cable shielding, for maximum protector against radio frequency interference.
- 24k hard gold plated contacts for excellent protection against corrosion

Available in 3 lengths:

PROI3401 1m £14.31	PROI3402 2m £20.18
PROI3405 5m £26.99	



PROFIGOLD PROA5600 SERIES

Digital Optical Cable – TosLink.

Features: Profigold toslink male to toslink male digital optical cable.

- Pearlescent chrome plated metal connector with metal inner case.
- Superior flexible outer cable jacket.
- Solid black coated non-reflection jacket

Available in 4 lengths:

PROA5601 1m £15.31	PROA5602 2m £18.88
PROA5603 3m £19.39	PROA5605 5m £20.42



THE INSIDER

Not reading the manual for your AV hardware? **Martin Dew** says you should – and he's even happy to help friends with their home cinema purchases if they're prepared to feed him

HOW MANY TIMES have you walked into a friend or family member's front room to find they are watching a Blu-ray disc with 'Concert Hall' or 'Mono 2.0' selected as the playback mode on their AV receiver? It might come off as a bit tactless to tell them to 'RTM' ('read the manual') of their components. And it might be just plain rude to ask them to 'RTFM'; this acronym has the added benefit of an expletive third letter. So, use it with caution.

Is picky receiver setup the sole preserve of propeller-heads, enthusiasts, and readers of magazines like ours? We're happy to sit down on a Saturday afternoon and pore over every feature on our gleaming new purchases when we bring them home. So then, you have to wonder, why would anyone fork out £1,000 on a state-of-the-art piece of electronics, and not want to have complete comprehension, and control, of all its assets?

Solid-state machinery with, say, 50 features that perform perfectly every time is, to me, a far more attractive thingy to have in the house than a communication device with, perhaps, 50,000 features that perform mostly well, most of the time. What's more, getting to know the manual of your new home cinema controller can be a source of pleasure, even though it does require some patience, and even though you may never use much of what it has to offer.

Call of Dew-ty

Because of my employment history, I frequently get called upon by friends to help them buy, and set up, their new audiovisual toys, and if there is a meal in the offing or the promise of liberal pouring of alcoholic beverages, it can be hard to resist an invitation. In one case recently, a film director's

personal assistant called me to ask if I would do the honours to help his boss choose a new receiver for a family room. We met in Woodland Hills, California, at Magnolia, the ostensibly 'hi-end' division of Best Buy, which itself is a huge 1,000-store American retail chain, and for a while graced the shores of England. Magnolia is the usually rearward enclave of select premium Best Buy stores in the USA, and brandishes various levels of in-home automation and dedicated AV room paraphernalia. The layout of this specialist area of the store has a visual appeal, but it's all a bit 'cookie-cutter', and, on closer inspection, probably doesn't really entice true hobbyists.

After scanning shelves of black Yamaha and Marantz faceplates, we received somewhat unspecific advice from a sales assistant concerning which product might best suit my friend's situation. **I was obviously familiar with this menu of impressive dishes, but the wait staff didn't quite cut it.** I also suspected the director was looking for something a bit more exotic or esoteric. We sped over to Shelley's Stereo and Video, an independent retailer down the road. Canadian brand Anthem was now on my radar for what I felt would accommodate this director's predilection and, no sooner had he got his questions answered by amenable staff, than we both left the store with a sealed MRX 510 receiver for an installation later that day.

So, in some circumstances, I don't mind being that go-to guy and the one that RTFMs for a friend. I get to learn the inner workings of another AVR and I can sleep better knowing that 'Jazz Club' won't be selected for playback of a movie masterpiece ■

Do you help friends and family with their AV problems? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

UK-born **Martin Dew** trained as an actor but ended up working for Lucasfilm THX and then NEC in the US. Now, though, he's back in front of the camera



Audio *Express*

Hot Deals on top brands, plus FREE **overnight*** delivery!

Prices include VAT • Brand new equipment (NOT graded) • 2 year guarantees • Authorised dealer for 25 years



Canton DM 50 white
Soundbase (Mint, Ex-Dem)

~~£399~~ **£299**



Focal Dome (5.1)
Home Cinema Speakers

~~£1500~~ **£699**



Yamaha RX-V377
+ Focal Dome (5.1)

~~£1759~~ **£899**



Yamaha RX-V677
+ Focal Dome (5.1)

~~£2059~~ **£1095**

HOME
CINEMA



Yamaha RX-A1030
Network 9.2 Receiver

~~£999~~ **£649**



Yamaha RX-A3030
Network 11.2 Receiver

~~£1999~~ **£1199**



Onkyo TX-NR838
+ Focal Dome (5.1)

~~£2499~~ **£1499**



Yamaha RX-A3040
+ Focal Dome (5.1)

~~£3499~~ **£2249**

Over 250

www.audio-express.co.uk

Hot Deals!



Tannoy DC6T SE
Speakers (Mint, Ex-Dem)

~~£999~~ **£549**



Tannoy DC4T (inc. plinths)
Floorstanding Speakers

~~£649~~ **£269**



Tannoy DC6SE
Speakers (Mint, Ex-Dem)

~~£699~~ **£299**



Tannoy Definition DC10T
Speakers (inc. plinths)

~~£5647~~ **£2799**

PURE
STEREO



Cyrus Streamline v2
Streamer / DAC / Amp

~~£1210~~ **£699**



Cyrus Lyric 05 (Mint, Ex-Dem)
CD / DAC / Network amp

~~£2250~~ **£1799**



Roksan Kandy K2 Amp
+ Roksan Kandy K2 CD

~~£1750~~ **£1250**



Cyrus pre DAC
+ Cyrus X Power

~~£2320~~ **£1399**

99%

★★★★★

TRUSTPILOT
RATING

Over 1000 five star customer reviews

"Shop with confidence!"



PayPal

Pay with **amazon**

98%

★★★★★

amazon
RATING

01743 236055

* Overnight delivery - terms and conditions apply; please see website for details.

01743 241924

Arcam • Audiolab • Canton • Cyrus • DALI • Denon • Focal • Marantz • Naim • Neat • Onkyo • Q Acoustics • Roksan • Tannoy • Wharfedale • Yamaha

Car? Park it outside!

HCC reader **John Johnston** has converted his garage into a sleek, stylish movie room



The room uses discreet in-wall and in-ceiling Monitor Audio speakers

John says the most frustrating part of the build was waiting for planning permission

Introduce yourself...

I'm John Johnston, aged 33, and I'm a professional photographer.

How long have you been into home cinema?

My friend Brian got me into it when I was around 18 years old. I remember he had a LaserDisc player and the picture quality it delivered was amazing at the time. And Dolby Pro-Logic was insane, too!

Then a few years later another friend had one of the first DVD players and, again, we couldn't believe the image quality. I guess this, amongst other things, got me hooked.

When did you decide to build the cinema?

Me and my girlfriend moved into our home in August 2013 and I knew as soon as we viewed the house that I wanted to build a dedicated home cinema room. It had a garage that was the perfect place to do the build.

How long did the project take?

It was done by a professional company,

Avcomm.TV (www.avcomm.tv). I would say the job only took around six weeks maximum from start to finish (after getting planning permission from the local council). Going from other folk who have had this done, I would say that is very fast. I didn't do any of the work myself (apart from making lots of cups of tea) but I would say I put a lot of thought into the design and look of the room and it's been done exactly as I'd described.

Roughly how much have you spent on it?

I did originally have a budget of £12,000. This was including most, if not all, of the equipment but it did rise to around £16,000. I wanted it looking really cool so when it came down to buying all the stuff, I didn't want to start penny-pinching.

What was the most challenging part of the build? Is there anything you'd do differently if you were doing it again?

For me there wasn't really anything challenging as I had a team of skilled pros

working on the job, but looking back I would say the most frustrating part was waiting on the approval of the planning permission at the beginning. I'm pretty impatient, though, and I wanted it done by Christmas. The folk building it and installing the AV gear pulled out all the stops to ensure I had it done by then. For that I can't thank them enough. I honestly cannot think of anything I would change or do differently.

So, what kit is in the system?

The projector is an Epson EH-TW8100, and it fires at a custom-made velvet fixed-frame screen using Cinesound Acoustic Transparent material. The sound system is a traditional 7.1 array (with rear speakers), incorporating three Monitor Audio WT280s for L/C/R, four Monitor Audio CT380-FX speakers for the rear and surround channels, and a Monitor Audio Radius 380 subwoofer.





John has since added additional seats at the rear of the room

The speaker system is powered by a Yamaha RX-V675 AV receiver, with sources including a PlayStation 4 and my own custom-built home theatre/gaming PC.

All the AV equipment and lighting is controlled by a Harmony Ultimate remote control. The strip lighting on the ceiling and floor can be changed to any colour.

Those chairs look comfy...

They are really comfy. I got them on eBay. They were actually not that expensive given the price of a lot of home cinema seats out there. I've also recently just added a small two-seater sofa behind them [not pictured], in case I have guests over.

Do you have your eye on any kit upgrades?

Not at the moment. The image quality off the

Epson projector is stunning, both with 2D movies and 3D. It's like my own IMAX cinema!

What's your favourite bit of kit?

The PJ is certainly up there, as is the Yamaha AVR for its sound performance, but, strangely, I really like the Harmony Ultimate, given that it's taken away around seven remotes. I can even control my main lights and the strip lights going along the ceiling from this handset. And let's not forget to mention the little fridge I have tucked in between my AV equipment; it's thirsty work watching all these movies/sports events and playing video games...

What are your favourite Blu-rays/games?

Too many to choose from but watching *Avatar* in 3D is simply stunning. *The Dark Knight* is up there, too – thunderous sound. Gaming-wise,

Call of Duty Ghosts through my gaming PC is pretty special. *FIFA 14* on the PS4 is amazing.

What's your verdict on the finished room?

Absolutely priceless. Ever since I was a kid I've always wanted my own home cinema. What makes it extra special is my late brother – who sadly passed almost ten years ago – always wanted one but never got the chance. Hopefully he's looking down with a big smile on his face.

How often do you make use of it?

Every day actually. Given the job I have, I spend a lot of time working from home, so this gives me the best opportunities to watch stuff, providing I finish all my work, of course ■

For a video peek, visit: www.johnjohnstonphotography.co.uk/blog/2014/02/my-home-cinema-room

OPPO®
Blu-ray



At the top of everyone's shortlist



Plush picture palace



HCC reader **Steve Clark** guides you through his 7.2-channel projector setup – and explains how he strived to create a 'real cinema experience', helped by some DIY and auction site browsing

Introduce yourself....

I'm Steve Clark, 58. My background has been mainly selling anything from houses to kettles, managing and later owning an electrical business. I enjoy a good challenge, especially when it comes down to sourcing a bargain.

How did you catch the home cinema bug?

I've always enjoyed technology, from the early days selling Philips LaserDisc players.

Setting up my first home cinema came really by accident. I started with an Epson projector. I used this for business meetings

a couple of times and then didn't touch it for years until I decided to see if it worked with my DVD player. And to my surprise it worked okay, playing on a basic pop-up screen. It wasn't long until I purchased an 'out of the box' Sony 5.1 home cinema package.

Whereabouts in your house is the cinema room?

It's in a spare bedroom and has taken just over two years to come together. I've changed the

Steve relaxes with his favourite magazine...



Our AV-holic went through three different colour schemes before finding the look he wanted



colour scheme three times as I wanted a room with atmosphere, rather than simply looking like a room with just a projector and a screen.

The seating had to be original cinema chairs. These were incredibly cheap (just over £400 for seven seats). When you're watching a movie it feels as if you're there in an actual cinema. Even details like my BBFC rating sign and the exit sign are original. Most of the items were purchased from auction websites very cheaply.

It's a very neat-looking room...

Thanks. I like to keep most of the cables hidden, using conduits colour-matched to the décor. It's much easier to upgrade any wiring or hardware on the surface than it is to channel everything through walls every time.

Over the last year I have made everything neater. I've tidied up areas like the AV cabinet placed at the back of the room, and tried to keep all the wiring down to a minimum and out of sight. Kit belongs at the rear – it's important to have only a screen to look at rather than a row of LED lights...

The raised plinth for the rear seats I made myself, with the built-in lighting which was very simple to achieve – the lights are outdoor decking types. It incorporates a lot of the wiring for the rear speakers and the rear sub woofer. It's just a timber framework with plywood, and the carpet fitters did the rest.

What hardware is in the system?

The projector is an Epson EH-TW5910, and I must say the contrast and bright 3D detailing are just fab.

The speaker system is a 7.2 configuration, driven by a Pioneer VSX-923 AV receiver. Compared to my previous Onkyo amp this is a lot smoother in delivery to the two KEF PSW-2000 subwoofers. You just have to hear the film *War Horse* when those large guns go off. It's like thunder and gives the seats a nice shake. One is placed directly behind the rear seats and the other in front of the screen.

Roughly how much have you spent on the whole room?

The whole setup so far has cost around £3,000 thanks to those auction sites!

What do your friends and family make of the room and your AV hobby?

They love the whole experience, particularly with 3D. Favourites have been *Frozen*, *Man of Steel* and *Avengers Assemble*. The latter has the best soundtrack on any Blu-ray.

After watching a film I'm always asked when the next showing is going to be. Some of my friends even want to hire the room out. Maybe I'll have to look into that...

Are you excited by 4K/Ultra HD?

I can't wait to see the cost of 4K PJs come down. I will be first in the queue.

Lastly: what's next on your kit list?

My next project is making the room feel even more original. Home cinema should be all about picture, sound and having a real experience. I would love an original Odeon clock or a 1950s Coca-Cola machine... ■



The rear window features a black-out blind to control light levels during the day

'I want a BIG screen!'

Brian Campbell reveals how a visit to a local multiplex inspired his own home cinema project



Introduce yourself...

I'm Brian Campbell, 37, from Northern Ireland. I got my first proper hi-fi when I was 12 and have been an AV addict ever since.

When did you decide to tackle your own cinema room?

My project to convert my loft room into this was started in Christmas 2012. I was fortunate that the largest cinema screen in Ireland was built less than a mile away from my house, the Antrim OmniMaxx. I went to watch *The Dark Knight Rises* and was blown away – the screen was huge, wall to wall, floor to ceiling. It was during that epic movie that I thought it would be amazing to try and replicate that at home – my own personal IMAX – so I did it.

I knew that to have such a large screen I needed to be aware of the viewing-distance-to-screen-size ratio but with 4K on the horizon, I knew that the technology would soon support that. I got three projectors head-to-head – the Sony VPL-VW85, the JVC DLA-X70

and the JVC DLA-X90. Naturally, the high-end DLA-X90 won the battle with its amazing contrast and 4K e-Shift upscaling. The image is so contrast-rich, and with e-Shift engaged a large screen and close viewing distance is not a problem.

So how big is the projector screen?

It's positioned along my sloping ceiling and it's over 60sq ft. When people ask about screen size, they are used to talking inches but I talk in square feet! It's basically wall-to-wall and floor-to-ceiling. As planned, this has created the effect I was after. You are totally absorbed in the viewing and that's just 2D. When watching 3D, because the screen starts on the floor, it's almost like a portal into another world – on some scenes it feels like you could just get up off your chair and walk into the movie – totally surreal!

It's a custom D.I.Y. screen, built to the exact dimensions that my room will allow, and uses milliskin spandex. When I demo a Sony 4K

AV-holic Brian has even designed his own pre-movie screen-filler to welcome guests

His digital movie collection is accessed via a Mede8er media player, with an iPad used to browse titles





The JVC PJ is housed in a purpose-built hushbox – vital as it is positioned near the seating area

projector I'm going to look at some different screen materials (Enlightor, Center Stage XD and Screen Innovations). With such a large screen, the challenge is to find a material that retains decent light, shows little or no sign of moiré or other artefacts, has little or no viewing cone, and retains good sound dispersion.

What other kit is in your system?

I've paired the JVC projector with an Onkyo TX-NR3008 AV receiver, which has the HQV Reon-VX chip that is pretty decent. This upscales my Sky+HD 1080i images to 1080p very well and then the JVC takes it to 4K with e-Shift. This pairing gives Sky HD a sharper and more solid-looking presentation, and sports and movies look so much better with this combination – an absolute must see!

I also have a Darbee Darblet which adds a nice sharpening/contrast enhancement to my images, without overcooking it or causing ringing. So it's a pretty impressive video chain, and I also do my own calibration and have various sensors for ensuring my image's colour, gamma and brightness are bang on, to get me the best image possible.

The Blu-ray player is a Panasonic DMP-BDT320 and I've also got a 3TB NAS drive for storing my movies. My media player is the 3D Mede8er 600x3D. I also have an Xbox 360. Most of my games are 3D-capable as that's how I like to play – so much more immersive.

All these devices are hooked up to my network. My router has an extender switch

'With 3D it's almost like a portal into another world – it feels like you could walk into the movie!'

box for extra ports as I like to have everything connected via LAN. My home automation of choice is LightwaveRF and I can control my lights/sockets, etc, from anywhere in the world.

The LightwaveRF also connects to my iPad Roomie Remote app. This is a lot simpler to set up than others, such as iRule, and non-professionals like me will find it much easier to integrate without the need to employ an installer. And, because all my kit is in a separate room, I need the iPad to control everything and Roomie Remote does a brilliant job. The Mede8er media player is also a great piece of kit and I can use my iPad to scan through all the covers of my BDs.

What about the audio side?

The speakers are the Special 'W' edition Focal 800 series for my front three. These are hidden behind the screen. My Onkyo receiver allows front height speakers so after the front left/centre/rights, I have two Linn Komponent 106s for front heights and another pair for the surround channels. The Linn's deliver every

nuance with a lovely sense of clarity and space. My subwoofer is a REL Q400e – 400W continuous power but with loads of headroom to reach 1,000W when required for impact moments. More than enough for my room size!

It's not the biggest room but it goes to show that with new technology you can have a high-quality largescale cinema experience in even a modest-sized room like mine.

How often do you use the cinema?

I'll watch Champions League football matches and all the major golf tournaments by myself or with friends (The Masters in 3D is the next best thing to being at the tournament!). For films, it's about two movies a week with the kids and maybe one or two grown-up flicks.

What are your current favourite discs?

For 3D, *Despicable Me* and *Despicable Me 2*. Great kids' movies and the 3D is amazing.

My reference 2D discs are *Skyfall*, *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* and *Art of Flight*. The latter is a snowboarding movie and is made with high-grade 4K RED cameras.

The helicopter panoramic views of the snowy mountains with these wonderfully sharp images gives a great sense of scale.

Overall, though, my favourite disc has to be *Tron: Legacy*. The Daft Punk soundtrack matched with the high-contrast images from my DLA-X90 gives everyone a 'jaw hits the floor' moment every time. I'm sure I'm not alone in saying *Tron...* is a feast for the senses! ■

This stunning system mixes bigscreen AV with a turntable-based hi-fi setup



Rock 'n' roll cinema

This high-end home theatre features custom-made speakers using granite enclosures. Proud owner **Terence Stamp** explains why he loves taking control of his own audio

Introduce yourself...

I'm Terence Stamp, 40 years old. I'm a landscape gardener, working in my own business in Australia.

How long have you been into home cinema? Do you remember the first AV setup you had?

I have been into hi-fi since I was six and blew up my Dad's speakers from playing them too loud! I tried building my first set of speakers when I was 12 – total fail. My system transitioned from hi-fi into a home cinema setup when I purchased the Denon AVC-A1 5.1-channel amplifier back in 2001. At that stage my cinema consisted of the Denon amp,

Denon DVD-3000, Denon POA-T3 three-channel amplifier, a Denon TU-S10 AM/FM tuner and a Loewe television. The speakers I built myself.

My home cinema has gone through many upgrades over time – at different stages I have had the Denon AVC-A1SRA, Denon POA-S10 monoblocks (three of them), Denon DVD-



2800, Rotel RB-1090 stereo amplifiers and the Rotel RMB-1095 multichannel amplifier. I installed a PJ in 2006, an InFocus.

Okay, so what's your current setup?

A Denon AVR-4520 for processing, and a Denon DBT-3313UD universal Blu-ray player. Then there is a Rotel RB-1090 stereo amplifier (to drive my subwoofers), two Rotel RB-1592 stereo amplifiers (for the front speakers only), and a Rotel RMB-1095 five-channel amplifier (for centre, rears and rear surrounds). I'm running a 7.2 speaker array (but have had up to 10.3 in the past) and all the speakers were built by myself, except the centre speaker, which is a Monitor Audio GX and the rear surrounds, which are Monitor Audio GS60s. I have over 70 metres of Van Den Hul Magnum speaker cable, plus other Van Den Hul interconnects.

The projector is an InFocus 3D model, aimed at a screen I made myself.

Additionally, I have a Pro-ject RPM10 turntable with Denon DL304 cartridge, and a Pro-ject Tube Box SE II pre-amplifier for the turntable.

What's your opinion of the system's performance? What areas, if any, do you think could be improved?

The problem with designing and building your own speakers is that you can always find improvements to make. Whether it be new drive units, upgrading crossover components, getting extra amplifiers – even rebuilding the room to improve acoustics. It seems the more I improve it, the more things I find wrong.



AV-holic Terence Stamp has been building his own speakers since he was only twelve years old

It could be psychological, as I am not happy but everyone else says they have never heard a better system.

The biggest weakness in my AV setup is the InFocus 3D projector. Although it does really good 3D with great 3D effects and colour saturation (*Finding Nemo*, for instance), it really struggles with normal 2D and I find myself having to re-calibrate all the settings for each movie to get a decent picture.

Sound-wise, the speakers I built myself, it's the best sound I have ever heard – and that is comparing them against other speakers such as Monitor Audio's Gold GX series, Dynaudio's Confidence C4 and B&W's 802SEs.

The whole system setup has a soundstage that immerses you in the movie. The twin >



Terence has opted for floorstanders for his surround channels



Hard at work, with some copies of HCC for company...

Focal 18in subwoofers produce sufficient low frequencies to induce nausea – and are also quite good at removing plasterboard from the ceiling. Great dynamics and control – I have measured a 136dB peak in the listening position when playing *The Prodigy* on vinyl!

So, on to the speakers: why did you decide to build your own?

I built my first pair of speakers because I didn't have the money to buy what I wanted! I used second-hand MDF and drive units from old speakers to configure them into something I could use. Over time I've learnt 1,000 ways not to build a pair of speakers, and new ways to refine and improve the overall configuration. This has included experimenting with port lengths, transmission lines, crossovers, cabinet construction and internal speaker cabling.

The best thing about the speakers is that they are now very flexible. I can run one speaker with one amplifier, or, if I won the lottery, they have the ability to be run with eight separate amplifiers or even fully active.

Why have you used granite cabinets?

It has a couple of advantages in cabinet construction. It breaks up resonance nodes due to its rough internal side, and its mass means it doesn't transfer energy to the enclosure.

The speaker enclosure is a mix of granite and MDF. The main speakers use 36mm

MDF and the subwoofers use 50mm MDF. The MDF is a dampening factor for the granite – a fully granite enclosure would suffer ringing due to its fundamental resonance. The granite is fully integrated into the enclosure – it's not cladding. Granite is also a natural rock and has a beauty of its own. I mainly use Blue Pearl granite in my speakers due to its large crystal structure.

My front speakers – which I have named 'the Monolith' – are constructed from three separate chambers bolted together, and include internal ports from top to bottom to increase the total volume of the enclosure. This not only increases the efficiency of the drivers, it also lowers the frequency response.

The speakers are quite serious-looking, but your subs feature custom artwork...

Yes – both my 18in subs have custom airbrushing on them. I was going through a stage where most of my loudspeakers had art work on them. The subwoofers were a good size to have artwork as the enclosure is quite large to allow it to accommodate the Focal multi-stack magnet drive unit.

Roughly how much have you spent on your cinema room?

The current setup you see here has cost around 70,000 Australian dollars, including getting a dedicated line from the electrical box

for just the home theatre. The learning curve to get to this stage (over the last 20 years) probably adds another 40,000 to that (trading in and selling other speakers).

So what do friends and family think of the system?

My children absolutely love the system and showing it off to their friends. My wife has contributed loads of time and money into the cinema room and is very happy to sit down and watch hours of *Game of Thrones* on the big screen.

Do you watch any movies/TV from download/streaming sites?

I'm not a fan of downloading movies as I find the quality suffers.

Anything else on your kit radar?

I am planning to build some front wide speakers to expand the soundstage. Other than that, a 4K 3D projector would be nice... ■

BE IN HCC!

EMAIL US: If you want to share your home cinema setup – big or small – with other HCC readers, email a selection of hi-res pictures (including one of yourself if you want) to letters@homecinemachoice.com with the subject heading 'AV-Holic', and we'll be in touch.

CALL FOR ACTION!

01784 470881



Customelectronicdesign

• Smart Home Solutions • Home Cinema • Hi-Fi • Lighting

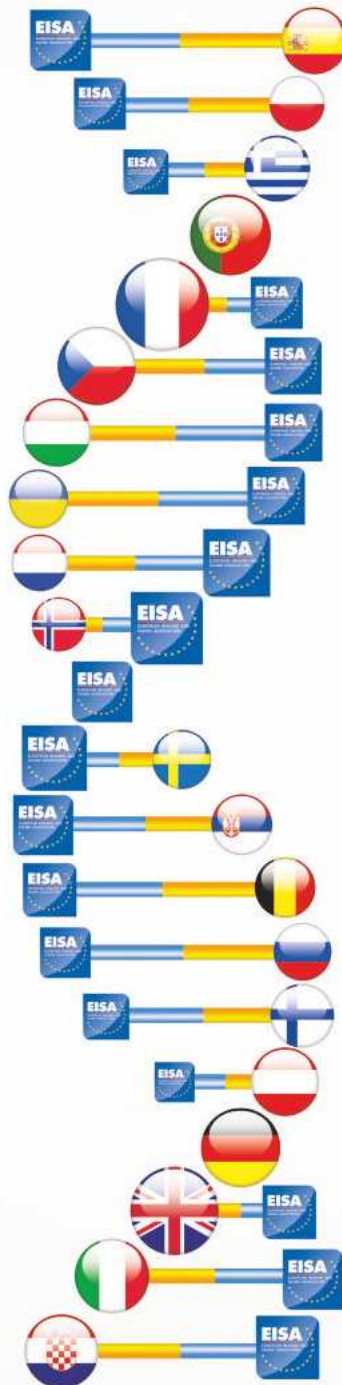
• www.customelectronicdesign.co.uk • Open Mon-Fri 10-6

- Kaleidescape • Oppo
- Anthem Statement • Arcam • Datasat • Denon
- Samsung • Sim2 • Sony
- Stewart • Screen Innovations • Vutec
- Amina • Dynaudio • Focal • PMC • Totem
- Paradigm • Velodyne
- Crestron • ProControl

• Design • Supply • Installation • Support

11 Charter Place, High Street, Egham, Surrey TW20 9EA

Quality is in the DNA of the Best Brands



EISA is the unique association of 50 special interest magazines in hi-fi, home theatre, in-car electronics, mobile electronics, photo and video, from 20 European countries.

Every year the EISA jury of experts rewards the best products in each class with an EISA Award.

Where you see the EISA Award logo it's your assurance that the product is of outstanding quality.



Your assurance for quality

Tested by the Experts
www.eisa.eu

inspiration is a choice of lifestyle...



Call **01922 623000** for a demonstration or be inspired at
www.getthebigpicture.co.uk

HOME CINEMA • MULTI-ROOM AUDIO • MULTI-ROOM SKY & HDTV • LIGHTING CONTROL • HOME AUTOMATION

THE BIG PICTURE. MULTI-AWARD WINNING HOME TECHNOLOGY SPECIALISTS



SERIE S

HEAR WHAT YOU'VE BEEN MISSING



Featuring the Serie S flagship S/5 with 12" Continuous Cast™ cone bass engine.

Visit rel.net to learn more about REL and find an authorized dealer near you.



“REL MAKES **SUPERB ACTIVE SUBWOOFERS** IN GENERAL AND THIS ONE IS **SO GOOD**, IT IS PEER TO AT LEAST ONE 15IN MODEL AND OTHER PRODUCTS NEARLY TWICE THE PRICE. IN THE S5, **DRIVER AND AMPLIFIER ENGINEERING** HAVE CREATED A **NEW BENCHMARK**.” | ADAM RAYNER, HOME CINEMA CHOICE

www.rel.net REL. Accept No Substitutes.

PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **SIN CITY: A DAME TO KILL FOR** Adults-only comic book caper is noir-ty but nice **HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON 2** DreamWorks' latest 'toon is a flaming success **TRANSFORMERS: AGE OF EXTINCTION** Dolby Atmos comes of age with Michael Bay's toy-tastic sequel **X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST** Two generations of Marvel's mutants unite **AND MUCH MORE!**

I am Groot!

Guardians of the Galaxy → Walt Disney → All-region BD

Can anything prevent the year's biggest box office smash from repeating its success in home cinemas? Find out as we give the eagerly-awaited Blu-ray a spin on p136

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆



'No Marv, I'm not going to sing
Danger Zone with you...'



Black and white and red all over

Belated comic book sequel finds more depth in its stereoscopic visuals than in its storytelling



Eva Green gives a red-hot performance
as the film's titular Dame to Kill For



→ SIN CITY: A DAME TO KILL FOR 3D

Almost a decade after they startled audiences with their first collaboration, filmmaker Robert Rodriguez and comic book icon Frank Miller have teamed up for a second collection of sordid, noir-infused tales dredged up from the depths of Miller's imagination.

Just Another Saturday Night finds Marv (Mickey Rourke) waking up on a deserted highway and piecing together the events that led him there, while *The Long Bad Night* follows the misadventures of a cocky young gambler (Joseph Gordon Levitt) who learns the true cost of beating Senator Roark (Powers Boothe) in a game of poker.

Dwight McCarthy (Josh Brolin, replacing Clive Owen) makes his return in *A Dame to Kill For*, a tale set several years before the events of the first film, which finds him caught up with the murderous machinations of a former lover (Eva Green). Finally, *Nancy's Last Dance* finds the titular stripper (Jessica Alba) haunted by the ghost of Hartigan (Bruce Willis) and planning her revenge.

Although it lacks the stylistic freshness of the first *Sin City* and not all of the stories quite click into gear, there's still fun to be had with this belated sequel, particularly the standout title story, thanks to Eva Green's wonderfully predatory femme fatale.

Picture: *A Dame to Kill For...* may want to plunge you into the depths of depravity, but it does so with plenty of panache thanks to a pristine AVC-encoded 1.85:1 digital-to-digital 1080p encode. The black-and-white-visuals are as crisp and contrasty as you could wish for, which allows the occasional pockets of colour to burst from the screen.

For our money, the stereoscopic presentation (which gets a disc of its own) is even better. The stark stylisation and total artificiality of the film's aesthetic allows Rodriguez and Miller to play around extensively with the 3D image. Negative and positive parallax effects are both in plentiful supply, giving the widescreen picture an intense sense of depth that moves beyond the limits of the screen with ease.

Audio: Lionsgate's Blu-ray arrives with an enjoyably aggressive DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundmix. Dialogue is handled flawlessly, while more action-packed material – such as Dwight and Marv's raid on the Lord mansion (Chapter 3) – showcase a wide dynamic range and convincing use of positional effects. Powerful stuff.

Extras: Bonus bits are a 30-min Q&A with the cast and crew; interviews with Eva Green, Jessica Alba, Josh Brolin and Joseph Gordon Levitt; and a pair of featurettes about the stunts and make-up FX repeated across the 2D and 3D platters.

HCC VERDICT

Sin City: A Dame to Kill For 3D
→ Lionsgate → Region B BD
→ £28 Approx

WE SAY: The film's a bit hit 'n' miss but this Blu-ray serves up stereoscopic visuals to, erm, kill for

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

A Million Ways to Die in the West

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£25 Approx



There may be a multitude of ways to die in the Wild West, but as far as Seth MacFarlane's Western spoof is concerned, laughing too much isn't one of them. Still, for all the feeble gags and pointless cameos, the film does at least look like the real deal, something that comes through in HD thanks to this appealing AVC 2.40:1 encode. Likewise, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix works wonders for Joel McNeely's stirring score. An extended (but no better) 'Unrated' cut of the film and an audio commentary are among the multitude of extras on offer.



Jersey Boys

Warner Bros. → All-region BD
£25 Approx



Does the idea of Clint Eastwood directing a musical bring back painful memories of *Paint Your Wagon*?

Well, don't worry. While based on a Broadway show, this Frankie Valli/The Four Seasons biopic keeps its musical moments fenced off as live performances and recording sessions within the story. This is a shame, because a little more singing and dancing may have added some much needed energy to this rather hum-drum drama. On a more positive note, *Jersey Boys* looks fine and sound wonderful on Blu-ray – although the three extras are rather perfunctory.



Maleficent

Walt Disney → All-region BD
£25 Approx



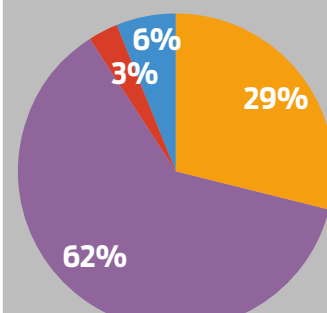
Following a little too closely in the footsteps of *Wicked*, Disney's live-action reinvention of one of its best-loved villains succeeds in winning you over thanks to Angelina Jolie's charismatic and surprisingly humorous take on the title role. Bursting with CG effects, the Blu-ray's AVC 2.40:1-framed Full HD visuals are simply sensational and come supported by a thunderous DTS-HD MA 7.1 soundtrack that does its best work with the battle scenes that bookend the story. Five deleted scenes and five brief *Making of...* featurettes make for a rather lacklustre batch of extras.



WE ASKED...

What do you think of the title of the new *Star Wars* sequel – *The Force Awakens*?

Great! Meh... Awful!
Who cares about *Star Wars*?



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action



How to make a superb 3D sequel

DreamWorks ends the year on a high with a remarkable follow-up to its 2010 smash



→ HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON 2: DELUXE EDITION

DreamWorks Animation has often seemed like a bit of an also-ran next to the might of Disney Pixar; a situation that has been exacerbated in recent years by a spectacular run of duds including *Rise of the Guardians*, *Turbo* and *Mr. Peabody & Sherman*. But, like any good story, just when things looked to be at their darkest, along comes a hero to save the day.

How to Train Your Dragon 2 is a wildly imaginative and riveting sequel that manages to expand on the world of its predecessor in a number of new and interesting ways. Its tell a darker, richer and more complex story than the first, albeit one that will still appeal to younger audiences thanks to its stunning visuals and goofy sense of humour. Let's just hope that the inevitable *How to Train Your Dragon 3* can keep the momentum going.



HCC VERDICT

How to Train Your Dragon 2 3D: Deluxe Edition

→ 20th Century Fox/DreamWorks
→ Region B BD → £28 Approx

WE SAY: Disappointing extras aside, the stereoscopic sequel soars on BD

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★☆☆☆

Overall ★★★★★

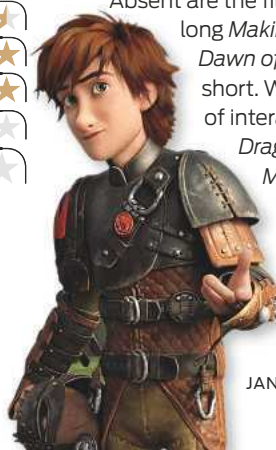
Picture: With acclaimed cinematographer Roger (Skyfall) Deakins serving as visual consultant, it's no surprise that *How to Train Your Dragon 2* looks absolutely majestic.

What we weren't quite prepared for, however, was the level of creativity the 'toon showcases when it comes to its stereoscopic presentation. Indeed, there are some sequences in the film (such as the dragon POV swooping over the army in Chapter 21) that rank among the most dynamic and immersive 3D you've yet witnessed in your home cinema.

Audio: The film's DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix is equally jaw-dropping. The opening Dragon Race kicks things off in fine style, surrounding you with audio effects from every speaker in the soundfield, and as the film progresses it simply gets better, with constant use made of the full array alongside deep bass, crystal-clear dialogue and rich instrumentation.

Extras: Giving lie to the 'Deluxe Edition' tag Fox has given this UK Blu-ray release, the best of the extras from the US iteration appear to have drowned somewhere in the Atlantic.

Absent are the filmmakers' commentary, hour-long *Making of...* documentary and the *Dawn of the Dragon Racers* animated short. Which leaves us with a trio of interactive databases (*Fishlegs' Dragon Stats*, *Drago's War Machines* and *Hiccup's Inventions in Flight*), a brief video tour of Berk, four deleted scenes, a gallery of 32 pieces of production art and a selection of trailers.



The pest controller came prepared for anything



DISC
OF THE
MONTH

The galaxy's most wanted

Marvel's band of intergalactic misfits boast some stellar AV credentials on Blu-ray



Guardians of the Galaxy is the third-highest grossing Marvel movie, behind Avengers Assemble and Iron Man 3



Bradley Cooper based Rocket's voice on Joe Pesci's performance in Goodfellas

→ GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

Until this year Marvel Studios had played it relatively safe, choosing well-known superheroes to bring to the multiplex. *Guardians of the Galaxy* is different. It leaves Earth far behind and jets off into the far reaches of the Marvel Universe for a space opera based on an obscure team of misfit heroes. A far bigger risk for the studio than *Iron Man* et al, but one that pays off handsomely.

Abducted by aliens as a child, Peter Quill (Chris Pratt) has grown up in the depths of space, where he works for a gang of pirates. When he 'liberates' an ancient treasure from a deserted planet, he finds himself a target for both his former comrades and the Kree fanatic Ronan (Lee Pace), who has his own plans for the mysterious orb.

As events spiral out of control and the fate of the galaxy hangs in the balance, Quill brings together a bunch of oddball characters – green-skinned killer Gamora (Zoe Saldana), vengeance-seeking brawler Drax (Dave Bautista), gun-loving mutant rodent Rocket (Bradley Cooper) and giant tree-man Groot (Vin Diesel) – to help save the day.

Guardians of the Galaxy's plot is pretty by-the-numbers, but it's how it's handled – and the cast of characters – that make it such an instant classic. Troma alumni James Gunn and co-writer Nicole Periman have crafted a snappy, anarchic blockbuster backed up by a superb ensemble cast.

Chris Pratt continues his post-*The LEGO Movie* march to superstardom with a turn that feels like the

sci-fi genre's answer to *Big Trouble in Little China's* Jack Burton, and pro wrestler Dave Bautista, given what initially appears to be a thankless gruff-strongman role, latches on to the humour of the part and offers a beautifully deadpan performance with excellent comic timing.

Meanwhile, the entirely CG-animated Rocket and Groot prove to be as believable as their human co-stars, which is even more surprising when you consider that they were fully animated, rather than motion-captured.

But above it all, the real star here is the writing. For every element of the plot that fizzles, there are another ten that show you something that you've never seen before, or make you laugh like an idiot. Smart and self aware, *Guardians of the Galaxy* breathes fresh life into both the space opera and superhero genres, and delivers all the action and spectacle that audiences demand from their Summer blockbusters.

Picture: Marvel's outer-space shenanigans look fantastic on Blu-ray, with an impeccable 2.40:1-framed AVC encode. While the locations are varied, ranging from the gloomy interior of Ronan's *Dark Aster* spaceship to the bright, sun-lit streets of Xandar, colour saturation remains constant, with the punchy array of bold primaries in the costumes and make-up coming to the fore. Behind this are rock-solid black levels, giving the vivid colour palette even more 'pop' and lending the 2D image a sense of depth. Detailing is also first-rate, with an intricacy in close-ups that beggars belief.

DEMO SCREEN...

Guardians of the Galaxy

Time code: 061.55 – 065.44



Pod chase: Gamora, Peter and Rocket jump into a trio of mining pods inside Knowhere in an effort to escape Ronan's forces, only to find themselves pursued by the sadistic Nebula



Rocket roll: Thankfully, while the pods may not be armed, they are pretty tough, allowing Rocket to smash through a pair of pursuing craft, delivering plenty of room-rattling LFE along the way



Gunning for fun: Star-Lord uses his pod to take control of an enemy craft, turning its weapons on other baddies. The ensuing destruction surrounds your sofa with impactful positional effects.



Into the void: When Gamora's pod is destroyed and her body drifts among the wreckage, the Blu-ray encode gets to demonstrate its talent for colour saturation and intricate detailing

Audio: This DTS-HD Master Audio 7.1 mix provides no shortage of acoustic thrills. The escape from the Klyn prison (Chapter 7) and pod chase in Knowhere (Chapter 11) are effective examples of just how forceful and involving the track's surround details are. And that's before we get to the final act, the assault on Xandar (Chapters 16 and 17), which is demo-worthy in its non-stop delivery of wraparound sonics and bountiful use of the .1 channel.

And there's the soundtrack, a jukebox of '70s and '80s hits (including David Bowie, Marvin Gaye and The Jackson 5) that's perhaps the best example of its type since Quentin Tarantino's first few flicks. Foot-tapping stuff.

Extras: *Guardians of the Galaxy* follows to a tee the template Disney has laid down for its Marvel Studios Blu-ray releases. Director/co-writer James Gunn goes solo for the audio commentary, which is rammed with details about the production and points out Easter Eggs for fans.

Further production details can be found in a pair of informative behind-the-scenes featurettes – *Guide to the Galaxy with James Gunn* (21 minutes) and *The Intergalactic Visual Effects of Guardians of the Galaxy* (seven minutes).



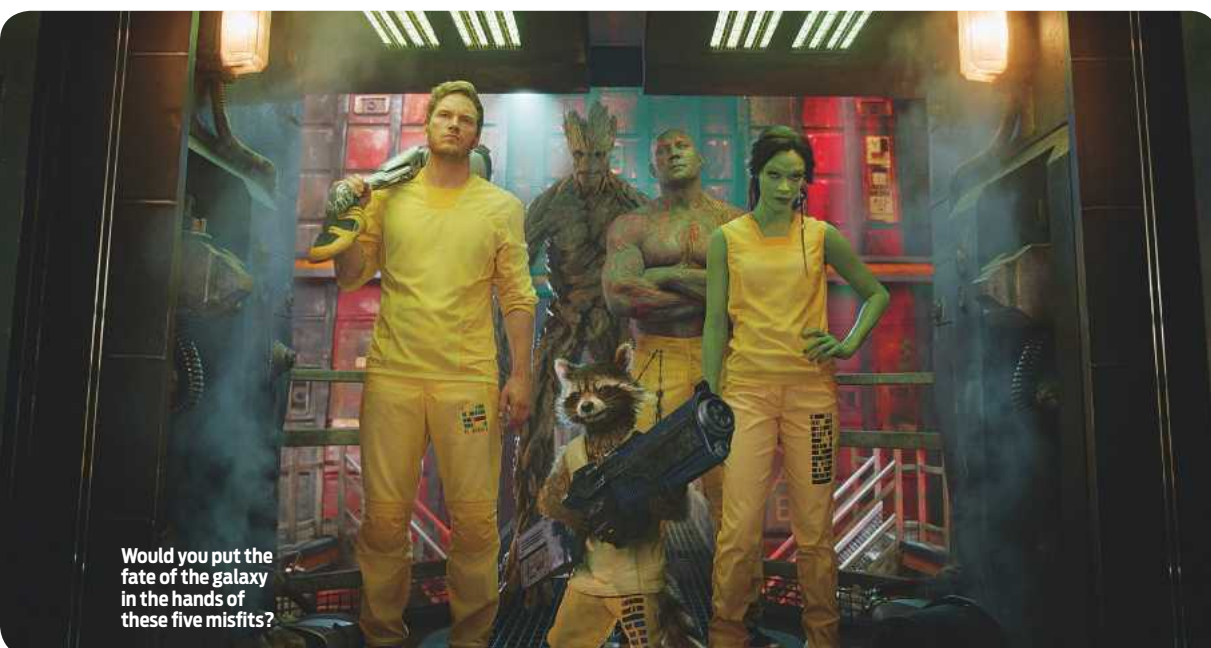
Next up are a gag reel (four minutes) and a collection of five deleted/extended scenes (four minutes) with optional commentary by Gunn explaining why they were cut. However, there is still material that appeared in the film's trailer that remains absent here.

Finally, in true cross-promotional style, there's an *Exclusive Look at Marvel's Avengers: Age of Ultron* promo (two minutes) that is made up of behind-the-scenes footage and interview snippets.

Sadly, it seems that the days when Marvel Studios would go the extra mile with feature-length *Making of...* documentaries, of the type that accompanied the first two *Iron Man* films on Blu-ray, are long gone.



Cosmo and Howard the Duck are among the film's many in-jokes for comic fans



Would you put the fate of the galaxy in the hands of these five misfits?



HCC VERDICT

Guardians of the Galaxy
→ Walt Disney → All-region BD
→ £25 Approx

WE SAY: Superb picture and sound quality make this an indispensable addition to your disc shelf

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★☆☆☆

Overall ★★★★★

ARCADE ACTION

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies. Check out these two videogames vying for time on your cinema system...

Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel!

2K Games → Xbox 360/PS3/PC/Mac → £30 Approx



It's slightly ironic that *Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel!* should arrive on shelves a handful of weeks after the debut of *Destiny*. Both titles share a similar core gameplay based around shooting, looting and upgrading skills. But their approaches couldn't be further apart.



As with its two predecessors, *Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel!* is packed to the brim with personality. So even if some may see this mid-price release as little more than an extended DLC for *Borderlands 2*, it ultimately doesn't matter because it's been pulled off with so much wit and charm.

Indeed, if you've played either of the earlier games in the series, then this latest outing really is just more of the same, but with the twist that the action plays out on Pandora's moon Elpis, which brings with it low-gravity fun and the need to regularly seek out oxygen pockets to keep you alive. The former shakes up the combat quite significantly, with vertical attacks quickly becoming all the rage. Otherwise, gameplay is familiar: select a mission, enter an open-world arena and start blasting away at everything you see and hoovering up the loot that gets left behind. And no matter how repetitive...*The Pre-Sequel* threatens to get, the vast array of weaponry and upgrades on offer will keep you coming back for more.



The Evil Within

Bethesda → XOne/Xbox 360/PS4/PS3/PC → £50 Approx



Survival horror is undergoing something of a resurgence right now, with The Creative Assembly's relentlessly terrifying *Alien: Isolation* (see p33) representing a new zenith for this style of game. This month's contender for the crown is *The Evil Within*, which is primarily notable for representing *Resident Evil* creator Shinji



Mikami's long-awaited return to the genre he helped popularize almost two decades ago.

The Evil Within lets players take control of Sebastian Castellanos, a police detective called in to investigate a spate of brutal murders at an insane

asylum, only to find himself pulled into a nightmarish world full of ghoulish apparitions and hideous monsters.

While recent additions in the *Resident Evil* franchise have focused more on action, this new game is more concerned with stealth, much like *Alien: Isolation*. Another trait it shares with that title is its cinematic aspiration – which here takes the form of visual cues pilfered from recent horror flicks and the decision to frame visuals in a 2.50:1 ultra-widescreen aspect ratio. This does have a rather deleterious knock-on effect on the core third-person gameplay, though, as it puts restrictions on vertical visibility, hampering what is otherwise a slick and enjoyable scare-'em-up.



Penny Dreadful: The Complete First Season

Paramount → All-region BD
£35 Approx



This British-American co-production owes a debt to 19th Century pulp fiction and brings together characters from *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* and *The Picture of Dorian Grey* for

a tale of supernatural mayhem. The result is a lurid and blood-streaked slice of Grand Guignol drama that quickly sinks its claws in and refuses to let go. This three-disc set hosts cinematic 1.78:1 encodes for all eight episodes, supported by atmospheric Dolby TrueHD 5.1 sonics and a smattering of all-too-brief extras.



Sleepy Hollow: The Complete First Season

20th Century Fox → Region A/B BD
£35 Approx



Apocalyptic apocrypha, masonic mysteries and fish-out-of-water japes combine in this fun reinvention of Washington Irvine's classic short story. A supernatural procedural in the

vein of *The X Files*, the show sees 18th Century soldier Ichabod Crane wake up in the present to do battle with the similarly revived Headless Horseman (who is actually one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse). Daft? Absolutely. But it's also highly enjoyable and gets the best out of this Blu-ray release with suitably moody visuals and creepy audio mixes.



Battlestar Galactica: Complete Original Series

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£65 Approx



This short-lived sci-fi series may struggle with woeful writing and patchy performances, but it cuts a pretty snazzy figure in hi-def. The 24 episodes that make up the show's initial run

and the 10 episodes of dismal follow-up *Galactica 1980* have been remastered and look impeccable. Audio comes in the form of sympathetic DTS-HD MA 5.1 remixes for the first series and DTS-HD MA 2.0 for its follow-up. In addition, all previous DVD bonus features have been carried over to this Blu-ray set.





Grimlock realised that maybe a phaal
cúrry was one step too far...

Robots in disguise refuse to change

Fourth instalment in the blockbuster sci-fi series is more of the same, only writ larger than ever

→ **TRANSFORMERS: AGE OF EXTINCTION**

In the five years following the 'Battle of Chicago', humanity has grown fearful of the Transformers, causing the US military to sever all ties with the Autobots. Meanwhile, an elite CIA black ops unit tasked with hunting down and destroying all surviving Decepticons has secretly been targeting Autobots as well, and supplying captured tech to robotics corporation KSI, which is attempting to build its own controllable Transformers.

Over in Texas, struggling inventor Cade Yeager (Mark Wahlberg) gets his hands on a dilapidated truck, which turns out to be Autobot leader Optimus Prime. When he and his daughter (Nicola Peltz) are threatened by the black ops team, they join forces with Prime in an attempt to save the remaining Autobots. Yet they don't realise that there is another player in the game, a robotic bounty hunter serving the creators of the Transformers, who has plans of his own for Optimus Prime...

It may boast an all-new cast of humans and robots, but this latest entrant in Michael Bay's money-spinning *Transformers* franchise is ultimately just more of the same – a breathtaking, bloated, flashy and soulless cavalcade of destruction and explosions presented on a truly epic scale. Indeed, movie mayhem doesn't get much bigger than this, and as far as fans of Michael Bay's hyperbolic style of action cinema are concerned, that's all that really matters.



Picture: With all the fuss that's been made about ...*Age of Extinction's* Dolby Atmos soundtrack, it's easy to overlook the fact that it's also one of the best-looking Blu-rays released this year.

Despite being shot using a mixture of digital and film stock (leading to the odd transitions from pristine clarity to grain and back again) the AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode is nuanced and offers startling detailing at all times. Colours are bold, giving the entire composition a hyper-real look, blacks are unfathomably deep and the image looks sharp enough to cut yourself on. Quite simply, reference-quality.

Audio: As mentioned above, this BD is notable for being the very first to feature a Dolby Atmos soundmix. We covered this in detail last issue, but suffice to say that we came away pretty impressed with the 'object-tracking' audio and the creative opportunities it opens for sound design.

For those of you without the requisite Atmos kit, the disc defaults to a Dolby TrueHD 7.1 mix that proves just as impressive on its own terms. Bursting at the seams with surround effects and room-rattling bass, the horizontal 7.1 incarnation delivers the sort of phenomenally powerful and expansive experience that buyers will expect.

Extras: All of the bonus features are relegated to a second hi-def platter. Here you'll find a fascinating two-hour *Making of...* documentary, an interview with Bay about his directorial style, a featurette about designing Transformers toys, and more. Not bad.



'Oreo-bot' is just one of many blatant pieces of product placement



HCC VERDICT

Transformers: Age of Extinction
→ Paramount → All-region BD
→ £25 Approx

WE SAY: With its Atmos mix and stunning visuals, this is one of the best demo discs around. The film's... okay

Movie ★★☆☆☆

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★



Singer's blockbuster sequel unleashes a plethora of mutants – both old and new



Singer brings unity to franchise

Returning director travels back in time to bring cohesion to 20th Century Fox's superhero series

→ X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST 3D

Over the course of the original trilogy, a 1960s-set prequel and two spin-offs for its breakout star, the *X-Men* movie franchise has tied itself up in myriad contradictory chronological knots. Taking its cues (and title) from one of the most popular comic book storylines, *...Days of Future Past* sees director Bryan Singer returning to the franchise in order to set things straight. Presumably once and for all.

Kicking off in a dystopian near-future, the movie finds the surviving cast from the original trilogy (Patrick Stewart, Ian McKellen, Hugh Jackman *et al*) making a final stand against the Sentinels, an army of unstoppable mutant-hunting robots. In a last ditch attempt to change things for the better, the surviving X-Men send Wolverine's consciousness back through time to occupy his body in 1973. There he must seek out the help of the younger Charles Xavier (James McAvoy) and Magneto (Michael Fassbender) in order to prevent the creation of the Sentinels.

For all of its time-travel shenanigans, *...Days of Future Past* avoids the usual temporal twists and turns you may be expecting and tells a pretty straightforward adrenaline-fueled superhero tale. The action beats arrive at a steady pace and even the downtime between them is made enjoyable by the excellent ensemble cast, who succeed in making their outrageous mutant characters all too human in their emotions and motivation. We can't wait to see where the franchise goes from here...



The Sentinels are one of the most iconic 'villains' from the many X-Men comics



HCC VERDICT

X-Men: Days of Future Past 3D
→ 20th Century Fox → All-region BD
→ £28 Approx

WESAY: A strong hi-def showing for a fun comic book flick – even if it looks set to be superseded within the year

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Picture: *X-Men: Days of Future Past* arrives on Blu-ray with a very impressive AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode. Colour saturation, contrast accuracy and fine detailing are every bit as impressive as you'd expect from a high-budget digitally-shot outing.

The accompanying MVC-encoded stereoscopic presentation (which gets a hi-def platter of its own) also holds up very well, no doubt by virtue of the film having been shot in native 3D. A prime example is Quicksilver's kitchen runaround (Chapter 15). This demonstrates a real mastery of the art form, with clever use of volumetric and spatial effects to give the image a real sense of depth. Very cool.

Audio: From the opening battle with the Sentinels (Chapter 2) to the moment Magneto starts having fun with a football stadium (Chapter 31), this film's DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix is the sort of unbridled riot of positional effects and booming LFE that brings the best out of your speaker setup. Dialogue is also picked out with punch and remains audible at all times, while John Ottman's powerful synth-tinged score serves to drive the action on to greater and greater heights.

Extras: The 2D platter includes five inconsequential deleted scenes (with optional commentary) that apparently won't appear in 'any other version of the film,' four behind-the-scenes featurettes, a gag reel, three image galleries and three trailers.

In other words, it looks like all the really good stuff is being saved for the 'Extended Cut' Blu-ray that has already been teased for release in 2015.

Spirited Away

StudioCanal → Region B BD
£25 Approx



This may be the last of Hayao Miyazaki's films to reach Blu-ray, but we can't imagine anybody thinking that it hasn't been worth the wait. The award-winning *Spirited Away* dazzles with a stunningly crisp and vividly saturated AVC 1.85:1 1080p transfer that brings the (mostly) hand-drawn animation to life brilliantly. While the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes (both original Japanese and the US dub) make fairly modest use of the surrounds, the front-end is expansive and bass is pleasingly forceful. There are no new extras, but most of the material from the original two-disc DVD release is included.



Out of the Unknown

BFI → R2 DVD → £70 Approx

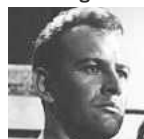


The fact that more than half of the episodes produced for this BBC sci-fi anthology series were wiped hasn't stopped the BFI from putting together a seven-disc boxset worthy of such a landmark in TV drama. The 20 surviving episodes give a fascinating taste of the show's ambitions and have been digitally restored to the best possible condition. These are joined by reconstructions (full soundtracks with stills) for four of the missing eps and an incomplete version of yet another. Further goodies include commentaries on 11 episodes, extensive stills galleries and a 42-minute retrospective documentary.



The Day the Earth Caught Fire

BFI → Region B BD → £20 Approx



Alongside *Out of the Unknown* (see left), this Blu-ray outing for Val Guest's thoughtful 1961 British disaster film is the highlight of the BFI's 'Sci-Fi: Days of Fear and Wonder' genre festivities. The centrepiece for this hi-def outing is a new 4K restoration of the film, supervised by the BFI National Archive, the results of which are absolutely staggering. Naturally, the film's LPCM mono audio isn't quite as attention-grabbing, but it too has been cleaned up. Copious extras include a newly-produced retrospective featurette and three nuclear-themed documentary films from the BFI archives.



Breaking the Waves

Artificial Eye → Region B BD
£20 Approx



Danish *enfant terrible* Lars Von Trier tries his hand at melodrama with typically controversial results in this ferocious and provocative love story from 1996. Based on a 4K restoration undertaken in Denmark, Artificial Eye's Blu-ray does a superb job of capturing the film's tricky visual style, which favours a sepia-tinted palette and large fluctuations in grain density. DTS-HD MA 5.1 and LPCM stereo mixes are provided, although given the nature of the source material, there's not a lot to differentiate them. Generous extras include commentary on selected scenes and deleted footage.



Stormy disaster flick really blows

Found-footage take on the genre only serves to whip up a funnel-cloud fiasco

→ INTO THE STORM

Remember the 1996 smash *Twister*? Well, this insipid flick treads familiar ground, pitting humanity against some adverse, yet entirely benign, weather conditions. Only this time, the concept has been given a found-footage makeover.

Populated entirely by tired stereotypes (strict dad, misunderstood teenage son, single-minded storm chaser), *Into the Storm* can't even be bothered to come up with a plot. Instead, it presents viewers with a collection of sequences in which successively larger cyclones destroy buildings while our protagonists try to either run away or hold on to something – all while continuing to film the mayhem around them.

It adds up to the sort of film that the Syfy channel cranks out on a pretty regular basis (albeit the digital effects here are at least much, much better). Unlike those flicks though, *Into the Storm* has absolutely zero personality and – outside of one brief 'fire-nado' – comes nowhere close to the sort of craziness and unbridled fun found in more trashy genre outings like *Volcano*, or even *Sharknado*.

Picture: Shot using a variety of digital cameras (everything from the high-end RED Epic to cheap-and-cheerful GoPro Hero 3s), *Into the Storm* makes a splash on Blu-ray with a crisp and textured AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode.

No matter how mad the digital effects get, delineation is always first-class, ensuring that the scenes of destruction are intricately rendered and have a sense of scale. Indeed, the only real surprise is that the filmmakers didn't take the opportunity to shoot it in 3D (or convert it in post).



Audio: Unsurprisingly, *Into The Storm* arrives with a gale-force DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. Digital FX-heavy scenes such as part of the town being hit by a twister (Chapter 5) or the destruction wrought by the colossal EF5 tornado (Chapter 8) are given considerably more threat and weight by the furious power of the winds gusting around your speaker setup. There's plenty of LFE here, too, with the mix regularly employing your subwoofer to underscore the meteorological mayhem with thudding effects.

Extras: Bonus features are about as thin on the ground as believable performances are in the film. *Into the Storm: Tornado Files* (11 minutes) looks at real storms and how they were recreated digitally here. *Titus: The Ultimate Storm Chasing Vehicle* (eight minutes) looks at the film's 'storm-proof' car. Finally, *Fake Storms: Real Conditions* (six minutes) focuses on the practical effects (rain, wind, etc) used to recreate storm conditions during shooting.



HCC VERDICT

Into the Storm

→ Warner Bros. → All-region BD

→ £25 Approx

WE SAY: The film may be a duffer, but its aggressive lossless audio means this disc may still go down a storm

Movie ★★☆☆☆

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★☆☆☆

Overall ★★☆☆☆



There's no place like home cinema

Stereoscopic conversion adds even more layers of enjoyment to this classic musical

→ THE WIZARD OF OZ 3D

It may be 75 years since it first played on the big screen, but this lavish musical based on L. Frank Baum's children's book remains charming and utterly unmissable.

Picture: Unlike the rather cheap stereoscopic ret-cons that some modern blockbusters have been subjected to, the 3D conversion of *The Wizard of Oz* was clearly a major undertaking and the results are rather special.

Every shot in the MVC 1.37:1 1080p encode has a convincing sense of depth and volume that goes far beyond the pop-up book style we expected. Mercifully, there's also minimal impact on the brightness or saturation of the image, which would have been problematic with such a relentlessly colourful film.

In this package, a second BD50 platter houses the traditional 2D version of ...Oz, derived from the same new 8K scan as the 3D

version. In truth, it's all but impossible to spot any differences between this and the highly-regarded previous release at a 1080p resolution.

Audio: The remixed 5.1 soundtrack may be encoded as DTS-HD MA rather than Dolby TrueHD this time around, but otherwise there's no discernible difference in audio between this re-release and the original Blu-ray. Dialogue is cleanly rendered, music is wonderfully lush and there's a reasonable amount of LFE and surround usage in the remixed track given the age of the source materials.



A Dolby Digital presentation of the original mono soundtrack can also be found among the Special Features on the set's 2D and 3D film platters.

Extras: As well as offering 2D and 3D presentations, this triple-disc set is packed with an extensive array of bonus goodies.

The really great news is that every single extra from the original 2009 release is present – albeit reshuffled slightly in order to accommodate an exhaustive and fascinating new 69-minute *The Making of The Wizard of Oz* documentary, narrated by Martin Sheen. The only other new extra is the inclusion of the trailer for the 3D re-release on both movie discs.

HCC VERDICT

The Wizard of Oz 3D

→ Warner Bros. → All-region BD
→ £28 Approx

WE SAY: A spectacular new 3D conversion accompanied by oodles of extras. What's not to love?

Movie ★★★★★

Picture ★★★★★

Audio ★★★★★

Extras ★★★★★

Overall ★★★★★

Once Upon a Time in America: Director's Cut

Warner Bros. → All-region BD
£25 Approx



Part crime epic, part languid mystery, Sergio Leone's 1984 masterpiece returns to Blu-ray with an additional 22 minutes of previously excised footage (bringing the total running time

to a whopping 251 minutes). The restored footage adds extra layers to characters and the central mystery – although it's in pretty rough shape, being taken from discarded strips of working positives rather than actual camera negatives. As such, the picture quality veers from very good to rather bad – but we're just happy the footage exists. This disc also includes a pair of trailers and an excerpt from a 1999 doc about Leone.



The Naked City

Arrow Academy → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £25 Approx



Shot in the streets and apartments of New York City, Jules Dassin's gripping film brought a sense of documentary

realism to the police procedural, in the process revitalising the noir genre as a whole. While Arrow's 1.37:1-framed Full HD encode exhibits light scratches, textures are generally well rendered and black levels are spot-on. Meanwhile, the bonus features are as comprehensive as you'd expect, covering the film, depictions of NYC on screen and the Hollywood blacklist. There are eight million stories in the naked city... and this is a brilliant Blu-ray package for one of the best!



Diary of a Lost Girl

Eureka: Masters of Cinema → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £23 Approx



Following the success of their collaboration on *Pandora's Box*, German filmmaker G.W. Pabst and American actress

Louise Brooks teamed up once again for this rather racy silent movie about one young woman's descent into debauchery. Based on a 1997 reconstruction of the film (which was heavily censored on its original release), *Diary of a Lost Girl* still suffers from plenty of tramlines, scratches and other damage, but the enhanced clarity offered by the new 2K restoration is simply wonderful. The LPCM 2.0 presentation of Javier Perez de Azpeitia's piano accompaniment is also worthy of praise.



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

www.hifichoice.co.uk

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE...

to getting the best possible sound from your hi-fi, whether you're buying, tuning or tweaking

Fuel your passion for sound and make your music sing **OUT NOW!**



[twitter.com@HiFiChoiceMag](https://twitter.com/HiFiChoiceMag)



facebook.com/hifichoice.co.uk

AUDIOVISUAL

— ONLINE —

- Home Cinema
- Hi-Fi
- Speakers
- Brackets
- Accessories
- Cables
- Furniture
- Mounts

**NEW
RANGE**

SPITFIRE CINEMA

Screens



**ON
SHOW**

Fixed	Electric
Tab Tension	In-ceiling

From
£520

Seating

100% LEATHER, ELECTRIC
RECLINE, GERMAN
MECHANISM



**0%
FINANCE**

**ON
SHOW**

Double
£1599

Single
£849



SPECTRAL

CALL US TO
BOOK A VIEWING



**ON
SHOW**

- ✓ Thousands of colours available
- ✓ Personalise from a huge range

Brick

From **£1349**

GERMAN
ENGINEERED



**ON
SHOW**

- ✓ Unique modern centrepiece
- ✓ Bespoke German made furniture

Scala

From **£1090**

0% Finance available

From £500, terms apply.

AV Distribution acts as a credit intermediary and only offers credit products for Pay4Later Ltd via secure trust bank plc. Credit provided subject to age and status.



Representative example			
Purchase price	£1499	Payment p/m	£56.25
Deposit	£149	Total repayable	£1499
Amount of credit	£1350	Duration	24 Months

Price promise

Prices checked daily.
Seen something
online cheaper?





Opening hours

Monday - Friday
9AM - 5PM

Saturday
10AM - 5PM

audiovisualonline.co.uk
01706 878444



<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>Bespoke</p> <p>Genesis Silver Spiral Speaker Cable</p> <p>Per Metre £40</p>	<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>Bespoke</p> <p>X-Tube XT-40 Speaker Cable</p> <p>Per Metre £10</p>	<p>LOW PRICE 2 YEAR WARRANTY</p> <p>audioquest</p> <p>DragonFly v1.2 USB Digital Audio Converter</p> <p>£129 ← PRICE PROMISE</p> <p>AWARD WINNER</p> <p>GREAT SOUND, ON THE GO!</p>							
<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>Bespoke</p> <p>Signature Revelation Speaker Cable</p> <p>Per Metre £16.95</p>	<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>Bespoke</p> <p>Ruby Anniversary Evolution Cable</p> <p>Per Metre £5.95</p>	<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>Bespoke</p> <p>Havana FX Dual Screen Cable</p> <p>Per Metre £4</p>							
<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>Bespoke</p> <p>Silver Anniversary XT Bi-Wire Cable</p> <p>Per Metre £13.95</p>	<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>Bespoke</p> <p>Original Speaker Cable</p> <p>Per Metre £3.95</p>	<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>Bespoke</p> <p>Havana FX Dual Screen Cable</p> <p>Per Metre £4</p>	<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>4 Lengths</p> <p>Stratus 7 Power Cable</p> <p>From £89.95</p>						
<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>Bespoke</p> <p>Profile 79 Strand Speaker Cable</p> <p>Per Metre £2.20</p>	<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>5 Lengths</p> <p>Prelude Digital Coaxial Cable</p> <p>From £52.90</p>	<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>6 Lengths</p> <p>Havana USB 2.0 Cable</p> <p>From £4.99</p>	<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>Bespoke</p> <p>Luna 7 Speaker Cable</p> <p>Per Metre £6.50</p>						
<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>3 Lengths</p> <p>Blue Heaven USB Cable A to B Plug</p> <p>From £189</p>	<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>Bespoke</p> <p>FLX-SLiP 14/4 Installation Cable</p> <p>Per Metre £5.80</p>	<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>4 Lengths</p> <p>Twist Speaker Cable Rhodium Plated</p> <p>From £75.60</p>	<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>4 Lengths</p> <p>Luna 7 Phono RCA Cable</p> <p>From £34.15</p>						
<p>50% Off Home Cinema Projector Screens</p> <p>50% OFF</p>	<p>1 Choose one of the selected home cinema projectors.</p> <p>2 Choose one of the selected home cinema projector screens and get it at half the price!</p> <p>✓ = Selected Projector</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td> <p>LOW PRICE NEW</p> <p>EH-TW6600 Lens Shift Projector</p> <p>£1399</p> </td> <td> <p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>EH-TW9200 Full HD 3D Projector</p> <p>£2698</p> </td> <td> <p>LOW PRICE 0% FINANCE</p> <p>VPL-HW40ES Full HD 3D Projector</p> <p>£1849</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> <p>LOW PRICE ON DEMO</p> <p>EH-TW9200W HD 3D Wireless Projector</p> <p>£2998</p> </td> <td> <p>LOW PRICE 0% FINANCE</p> <p>VPL-HW55ES Full HD 3D Projector</p> <p>£2798</p> <p>* While stocks last</p> </td> <td> <p>LOW PRICE 4K ULTRA HD</p> <p>VPL-VW300ES 4K 3D Projector</p> <p>£5850</p> </td> </tr> </table>			<p>LOW PRICE NEW</p> <p>EH-TW6600 Lens Shift Projector</p> <p>£1399</p>	<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>EH-TW9200 Full HD 3D Projector</p> <p>£2698</p>	<p>LOW PRICE 0% FINANCE</p> <p>VPL-HW40ES Full HD 3D Projector</p> <p>£1849</p>	<p>LOW PRICE ON DEMO</p> <p>EH-TW9200W HD 3D Wireless Projector</p> <p>£2998</p>	<p>LOW PRICE 0% FINANCE</p> <p>VPL-HW55ES Full HD 3D Projector</p> <p>£2798</p> <p>* While stocks last</p>	<p>LOW PRICE 4K ULTRA HD</p> <p>VPL-VW300ES 4K 3D Projector</p> <p>£5850</p>
<p>LOW PRICE NEW</p> <p>EH-TW6600 Lens Shift Projector</p> <p>£1399</p>	<p>LOW PRICE</p> <p>EH-TW9200 Full HD 3D Projector</p> <p>£2698</p>	<p>LOW PRICE 0% FINANCE</p> <p>VPL-HW40ES Full HD 3D Projector</p> <p>£1849</p>							
<p>LOW PRICE ON DEMO</p> <p>EH-TW9200W HD 3D Wireless Projector</p> <p>£2998</p>	<p>LOW PRICE 0% FINANCE</p> <p>VPL-HW55ES Full HD 3D Projector</p> <p>£2798</p> <p>* While stocks last</p>	<p>LOW PRICE 4K ULTRA HD</p> <p>VPL-VW300ES 4K 3D Projector</p> <p>£5850</p>							

Cable workshop

Made to your exact specification.



Free delivery

To most mainland UK addresses.



Showroom

Call and arrange a demo with us.





POINT OF VIEW

AVR manufacturers be warned: **Richard Stevenson** is having yet another attack of middle-aged grumpiness and it's all your fault

I'VE HAD QUITE a few AV receivers guest-starring in my setup recently, from budget models to high-end beasts, and, y'know what, I'm beginning to spot a trend. They're all frustrating. All of them. And here's why...

Corded setup mics. I know most people only use them once, but why can't AVR setup mics be wireless? Every one weighs about as much as a helium-filled pea, yet is attached to 10m of cable. Whatever you place the mic on, the weight of the cable pulls it off. Half a pack of Blu-tak is essential and that's not so clever if you're thinking of placing the mic in the best spot, which is on top of your head in the prime positioning. **If you've seen me at hi-fi and AV shows wearing a hat, it's to cover up my mass of tangled hair.**

AVR speaker binding posts. Okay, there are a lot of terminals on a rear panel these days but why place them so close together? This limits most AVRs to gossamer thread cables and requires the finger dexterity of an eight-year-old pianist. Given my sausagey digits, I have resorted to installing banana plugs on all 15 pairs of test cables. Yet these connections are frustrated by an EU-ruling part-banning 4mm terminals a while ago, which has forced makers to install micro-plugs in the banana plug sockets that need to be removed before hookup – and leveraging out two dozen or so little plugs gets annoying after about the third time.

Networking issues. When almost every device you will connect to your AVR is networked, it really should offer a multiport Ethernet switch. Scant few do, and fewer still (thinking about it, none) offer Ethernet over HDMI. 'Oh, it's all wireless,' you say. But then why do some AVR manufacturers supply a Wi-Fi dongle the size of a pack of playing cards on a fly-lead? Build the damn aerial into the chassis.

AV equipment with three legs is another bugbear. This configuration may have some nebulous audiophile vibration-grounding benefits, but it's just not sensible. Lean on the back corner to peer over at your connections, and the unit will tip up, causing you to face-pack into the cabling and/or head-butt the wall. Trust me, I've done it.

And there's more!

Still here? Good, 'cos I'm not finished. On the minor but still irritating list, we have AVRs with the old-school design of big knobs at either side of the display, blue LEDs so bright you end up seeing spots for a week, and the continued incorporation of an AM loop antenna for the 0.001% of AV enthusiasts likely to listen to AM radio on their new system.

And then there's the packaging. Unbox an AVR with anything less than utmost care and its polystyrene packaging will gently disintegrate into tiny white beads with the static attraction of industrial magnets. Where ever you go, they will follow, so within a few hours the combined traipsing of myself, Mrs S and the dog means the whole house looks like a snow scene from a nativity play.

My final objection goes to that doyen of today's electronics, the Quick Start Guide. Who the hell buys an enthusiast-level device like an AVR and wants or expects a 'quick start'? AVRs are about achieving best performance and that is always going to involve time, effort and fine tuning. So if I was allowed to wave a magic wand and blanket address just one of my gripes, I would change all the Quick Start Guides. They would be blank, save for the phrase: 'Life and AVRs have a lot in common – there is no quick start.' ■

Want to add your own AV gripe to Richard's list? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Richard Stevenson uses a wood-screw on the end of a stick to remove the caps from his banana plug sockets, and says you can have that tip for free





The heart and soul of home cinema

Precision, a luxury and highly regarded loudspeaker range from Tannoy, engineered to deliver movies precisely as the director intended. High power double-magnet drivers, mass-load cabinets and extremely low-loss crossovers effortlessly deliver breath-taking detail and explosive movie dynamics. Built around a brand new 6 inch (150 mm) version of Tannoy's world renowned Dual Concentric™ driver, two stunning floorstanding models, a compact stand-mount and matching centre channel speaker ensure there is a Precision multichannel system for every size room. Powerful, passionate and incredibly precise, Precision gets to the heart and soul of home cinema like no other speaker in its class.



tannoy.com



October 2013 - Precision 6.2



Precision 6.2



Precision 6.4



Precision 6.2 / 6.1 / 6C /
TS2.12 system



Precision 6.2 / 6.1 / 6C /
TS2.12 system

oppo



Universal disc & media players

The latest Darbee Editions take home theatre beyond accuracy delivering enhanced picture quality and premium sound. Darbee Visual Presence™ provides greater clarity and increases the perception of depth resulting in a more dynamic, lifelike experience.

“It's like lifting a veil”



BDP-103D



“Excellent AV performance”



“The video performance is exemplary”

“Reference video processing”

BDP-105D



“...the player to beat if you're looking to make the most of your disc and file collection. Immensely versatile, this is Blu-ray at its brilliant best.”



“A price that's well worth paying.”



“For CD - Try this!”

“This is one of the best digital players I have ever heard.”



oppodigital.co.uk